

Lady Velisna

Written by: cylobaby

Based of the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowlings, which I do not own.

You, my fine reader, are about to enter a world where magic is real. A world where cobras can talk and curses aren't just swear words. Where people are not always as they appear-- and where some are exactly as they appear. The world of one girl who must overcome guilt and desire, fear and rebellion to gain freedom and love. The world of The Stunner. The world of Lily Evans.

Chapter 1: The Muggle Home

At midnight, a cloaked figure snuck up to a quiet, one-story house in a poor neighborhood. The house's chipped red paint was dull in the moonlight, but a well-tended garden bloomed out front. Bright yellows and reds were electric in comparison to the old cabin. The windows were closed, tattered curtains drawn tight, to keep out the summer bugs and heat.

The figure in black walked silently, but with deadly purpose. When the moonlight hit her shadowed face as she turned at the door, beautiful features could be distinguished accompanied by stunning emerald eyes that seemed to produce a light of their own. She was in her middle teen years; 16 to be exact.

Lily Delilah Aria Evans went to Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, and was currently on summer break before her 7th year; spending what should have been her leisurely time, sneaking into peoples' houses on strict orders. She snuck through the back door. Taking her time, Lily crept through the Muggle house. The one story building contained three bedrooms. After marking each room in her head, Lily headed back to the most threatening occupants, the parents, in the master bedroom.

"Stupefy." Red light flooded the small room and both sleeping adults were knocked into unconsciousness. The Muggles had no way of waking once one of Lily's Stunners had hit them.

She snuck to the next room on her mental list, a small guest room decorated with a tacky fish border and sailor objects. An old Muggle man snoozed gently on a cramped twin bed.

"Probably a grandfather," thought Lily in remorse. She blocked out her traitorous thoughts and whispered the stunning spell yet again.

The last room was, as Lily knew from her first walk around the house, sponge-painted pink and purple and full of Barbie dolls strewn across the floor. The witch slipped into the room. She walked over to the small bed to find the occupant wide-awake.

Large blue eyes gazed at her fearfully. Not wanting the girl's last thoughts to be of terror, Lily took a comforting step forward. The young blonde toddler scrambled back on the bed, whimpering quietly.

"It's okay," Lily crooned. The girl hesitated and Lily used that moment to slowly draw her wand out and mutter, "Stupefy."

The little girl fell back in the covers, completely unconscious. Guilt flooded through Lily's body, but training took over. Blocking out the image of the scared toddler, she walked out of the house. The redhead shot green wand sparks into the cloudless night sky.

Two cracking sounds came from behind her and Rafael Malfoy and his recently recruited son, Lucius, appeared. "Is the house secure?" asked Malfoy Sr.

"Of course," Lily whispered, nodding.

The tall Death Eater motioned to his son and boldly entered the Muggle house.

Within minutes the duo of Malfoys had returned, pocketing their wands. "Is it done?" asked Lily softly, though she knew the answer.

The men nodded simultaneously. Lily raised her wand to point it at the stars. "Morsemorde," she hissed.

A ghastly green skull with a snake protruding from its mouth rose into the air from the tip of her wand. The Dark Mark hung in the air, a beacon of death only visible to wizards. It represented the fate of the four Muggles inside.

Lily and the others Apparated back to Nightshade Mansion, Death Eater Headquarters. Of course, Apparating without an official license was illegal, but it was not even close to the worst thing the teenager had done.

The three people Apparated outside of a gate in a dark forest. They entered quickly, headed for the meeting room.

The trio strode quickly through the maze of hallways, uneager to keep Lord Voldemort waiting. Once they reached it, a house-elf waiting outside told them to enter at once.

The meeting room was painted dark green and silver in honor of Salazar Slytherin, Voldemort's most honored ancestor. A high ceiling spoke of the wealth of the owner of the mansion, and the lack of dust proved a very well trained cleaning crew. A long table sat in the middle of the room surrounded by green, rich, velvet covered chairs.

Standing in wait was the Dark Lord Voldemort. He had dark brown hair that magically had no gray in it. Long black robes covered his fit body and his red eyes stared carelessly at the trio. His face was strong and handsome, but had a coldness to it that chilled the hearts of those unused to it.

"Leave us," hissed the heir of Slytherin at the Malfoys. They bowed low and exited.

Lily stood alone, gazing emotionlessly at the powerful wizard before her.

"I trust everything went according to plan?" said Voldemort carelessly as though he knew the answer he would receive.

"Of course," whispered Lily, keeping her face completely void of emotion, down to her green eyes.

The Dark Lord chuckled. "You are special," he said in his snake-like voice. "You are like a daughter to me. Because of this, I have decided you are not to have the Dark Mark. No, we are family. I will adopt you the Slytherin way. You shall get the Mark of Salazar."

"He always did like to get straight to the point," Lily thought wryly. What he said was true though; they were like family. Voldemort gave her everything she needed; a home, food, clothes, a father.

He taught her spells far beyond N.E.W.T level. Though she was muggleborn, Voldemort said her magical ability was nearly as great as his own. He had taught her Occlumency and Legilimency. He had

even taught her the Dark Arts and controlled, though power-draining, wandless magic. Everything she knew of magic (other than first-year spells) he had taught her.

Voldemort continued. "The Mark of Salazar is simply a tattoo, albeit a magical one. Maybe I should explain more. Salazar Slytherin gave all of his greatest followers and his worthy family the same mark. Indeed, I received mine during my Sorting when Slytherin could see into my mind.

"Maybe I should show you it." Voldemort slowly rolled up his black sleeve, revealing lightly tanned skin. He showed her a tattoo on the inside of his arm. It was of a coiled snake with a green and silver diamond patten, approximately the size of Lily's pointer finger.

As Lily watched, the tattoo raised its head and its flat tongue slid through its mouth. Though two-dimensional, Lily could see depth.

"It can move across you arm and will know your thoughts. Your Mark is you. If you are energetic it will move faster and so on. You will find it very helpful," Voldemort said, all the while gazing at his own arm.

"Do you accept?" he asked, suddenly looking into her green eyes.

"Of course," Lily whispered without hesitation. Voldemort motioned her beside her. She walked slowly, feet making no sound on the wooden floor. Apprehension filled her, but she knew she had to do this to gain Voldemort's trust.

"From father to daughter I bestow on the...

"...the Mark of Salazar, the way to be free!" hissed Voldemort before repeating the words in Parseltongue.

Pain erupted on Lily's arm. She closed her eyes, bit the inside of her cheek and waited for it to subside. She felt a cold sensation wash over the once agonizing pain and let out the breath she had not been aware she was holding.

"There. It is done," came the hissing voice from beside her.

Lily opened her eyes and looked down at the symbol. It stared back at her, motionless. Then, it blinked and curled up into a coil. It looked as tired as she felt.

“There is one other thing,” Voldemort said slowly. “Your name is too well-known. If we refer to you as Lily Evans, any person may discover who you are. I have pondered on this and I decided to do the same for you as I did for me. You are no longer Lily Delilah Aria Evans. Welcome to the family, Lady Velisna.”

Chapter 3: Snape

Lily awoke the next morning at dawn, as usual. The moment the sun peeked over the horizon Lily's eyes shot open. She lay in bed resting, thinking. Last night's events had kept her awake in thought until 3 in the morning.

The little girl has reminded her of a child she used to baby-sit. That toddler she had been responsible for killing probably had had the same carefree attitude, same love for life. It seemed a lifetime ago that she had sat in their house and played Barbies with the little Veronica. She could hardly imagine her self laughing with a baby.

Of course, hers was not the first death that had struck a cord. Hers just happened to be on the same night that other things had happened to mess with her nerves.

Voldemort had as good as adopted her. He had thought her worthy of being an heir of Slytherin; for all that she was a muggleborn Gryffindor. He often claimed fondly that if he had gotten a hold of her before her Sorting that she would have been placed in the Pure House.

Lily had had no choice but to accept his offering. If she was ever to escape him she needed his complete trust.

The thought of escape was what kept her going. Escape from Voldemort, escape from the groveling, cowardly Death Eaters, escape from her bonds, escape from her feelings, escape from death. Someday... someday she and the one she loved would be safe.

A knock on the door drew her out of her trance. "Come in," Lily called imperiously, stowing her thoughts away for later scrutiny.

A little bald house-elf with a long nose poked her head in. "Master would like Lady Velisna to accompany him for breakfast now."

Lily nodded and said, "Thank you, Pimplen. Tell the Dark Lord to expect me in ten minutes."

Primplen bowed so low that her abnormally long nose brushed the soft green carpet. "As you wish, miss." She exited the room without another room.

Lily slipped out of the silver covers and glided over to her dresser, instinctively masking her weariness. She pulled a set of black robes with a black undershirt and flexible pants.

Right before Lily pulled on her shirt she saw her serpent tattoo gazing at her, its emerald eyes, causing its silver, thin pupils to dilate in the light. It too looked like it had just woken up. With an audible sigh she covered it with her strict black shirt.

The girl stepped into her black pants and pulled her robe over top. She slipped on a pair of jet black tennis shoes and went to the mirror. In it she saw a pale girl of about 5 foot 8. Lily had waist-length auburn hair and bright emerald eyes that were surrounded by thick dark red lashes. Lily looked closer at her eyes, curious as to what they showed. Eyes were Lily's obsession: she had a habit of looking into eyes, trying to sense their thoughts.

The emerald orbs were fathomless, seemed to show no emotion and yet every emotion. Lily knew her eyes were the window to her soul so she often tried to keep the shutters closed.

Her body was lithe and fit, perfect for silent murders at midnight. She was one thing that didn't go bump in the night. She had gone through intense training over the last few summers to keep her ready for anything that may come her way. She had the reflexes of a cat and disdain of one too.

She picked up an ebony comb emblazed with the Slytherin crest and brushed it calmly through her abundant hair. The action calmed her and cleared her weary mind. When it was free of knots, Lily pulled into an impeccably perfect sleek ponytail.

Lily strode out the door, leaving herself two minutes to get to the Breakfast Room. She glided down dark corridors, comfortable with the spooky portraits and eerie silence.

The Nightshade Mansion was Unplottable, in the center of a massive forest, had more anti-Muggle, anti-Apparation, and booby traps than stars in the sky. It had high ceilings and all the walls were different shades of green. Elaborate Vs covered the rooms in honor of the Master of the Mansion.

Lily entered the Breakfast Room casually. "Ah, Lady Velisna, exactly ten minutes." The hissing voice that came from in front of her was expected.

"Of course," whispered Lily. She began to make her way to her usual seat at the opposite end of the long table from Voldemort.

The Dark Lord held up a tan hand to halt her. "Sit beside me. We have company today. Obviously they aren't as punctual as you."

Lily changed direction mid-step and settled down next to the Dark Lord. They sat in silence for the next five minutes. Suddenly the door creaked open and revealed a man standing behind what appeared to be his son.

Both had black hair and hooked noses. The boy looked familiar, but Lily couldn't place how at the moment. The man was heavily tanned and had a naturally mean expression on his face. The teen, on the other hand, looked as though he stayed inside as much as he could.

"Lady Velisna, I would like you to be our newest recruit and his father, Tantakah Snape."

Lily nodded regally to them and looked back to Voldemort.

"Master, we live only to please you," declared the man. His son remained silent, but Lily had a feeling he had nodded from behind her.

Voldemort waved lazily at a pair of chairs that were across from Lily. The Dark Lord himself sat at the coveted head of the table.

The Snapes sat down uneasily. At least the man, Tantakah, did; his son showed no emotion either way. Lily caught his black eyes with her green ones and detected his great skill in Occlumency. He

seemed to notice the same in her and they looked away simultaneously.

A group of house-elves entered and set the food on the table. Pitchers of water were beside every cup and the layout of sizzling bacon, eggs and sausage was exquisite. Lily and her adoptive father ate little, just enough to sustain them until the noontide meal. Tantakah Snape, however, ate as much he could grab and his son did likewise, but with more elegance.

Once they had all finished, Voldemort said to Lily, "The Snapes will be staying here for this week. Show them around the Mansion. However, I must now take my leave. I'll see you at supper, Velisna."

Lily nodded and the Dark Lord swept out of the room. She stood up and motioned for the duo to do the same.

"Follow me," she whispered. The girl led them first to the ballroom.

"This is where we gather if there is a meeting of more than thirty." After allowing them to look for a moment, she turned down a dark hallway that led to the banquet hall.

Tantakah spoke up. "So, it's 'Lady Velisna' now, is it? Last time I checked you were just a lucky mudblood named Lily Evans."

Lily ignored the jibe about her heritage with difficulty for Tantakah had been there the day they had killed her parents. Instead of retorting, she hissed fiercely, glad to have someone to vent her anger on to, "I suppose the Dark Lord decided that his adoptive daughter should have a title."

A stunned silence followed. Then Tantakah scoffed. "I doubt the Dark Lord would ever associate with you any more than necessary."

Lily gave a short, mocking laugh that caused Snape to shiver slightly. She whispered, "Ask him, if you dare."

Tantakah nodded. "I will." He then swooped off in search of his Master, leaving her alone with his son. Lily smirked slightly. She knew

that once he interrupted Voldemort he would pay dearly. Not with his life, but he probably wouldn't be out of bed for the next few days.

"Aren't you supposed to be a Gryffindor?" asked the boy causally, his black eyes fathomless.

It suddenly struck the name Snape had seemed so familiar. "Well, Severus, I suppose not everyone is who they appear to be," Lily murmured. Indeed Severus Snape had always struck as a quiet boy, never finding an ally against the bullies that taunted him constantly. Lily had in fact, been itching to call him Snivellus, as was his nickname in school, just as revenge. She had once tried to help him, but he had been more ungrateful than she had first expected.

"I guess not," he said as quietly, probably with the same thoughts on her as she had had on him.

Lily motioned for him to walk with her. "I will still show you the mansion, even if your father decided to desert us to disrupt the Dark Lord. He just might be forgiven for his lack of faith."

Lily led him to the banquet hall in silence. The spacious room was full of tabled and benches for the use of any Death Eater. The cavernous hall echoed everything eerily causing their footsteps to seem louder than normal. Severus walked forward to inspect a table.

On a hunch, Lily silently drew out her wand and whispered, "Legillimens." She was in before he had time to react. Memories flooded into her.

Severus was watching his father yelling at his cowering mother and felt loathing rise inside of him.

The Marauders were taunting him, daring him to respond with their wands at his throat.

He watched his father talking to the Dark Lord about the need to exterminate all Muggles. Disgust, hatred and an acute sense of being trapped filled his body.

An image of lake came up, but before Lily could see the memory she heard a panicked voice shout, "Protego!"

Lily's brain registered what was about to happen just before she was hit. Now it was her own memories, the ones she had learned to ignore, that flooded through her.

Lily made the choice between the death of herself and her sister or being a Death Eater.

Lily watched the Dark Lord torture a Muggle child for amusement then looked away in masked repulsion.

Panic rose inside her and she quickly stopped the flood of memories by throwing up steel blockades around her mind.

Severus lay panting on the cold floor, looking up at her with triumph in his weary black eyes.

Lily whispered frantically, "I won't tell if you don't."

Severus nodded as though she had just spoken his thoughts out loud. "Are we the only ones who think this way?" he asked casually, though his eyes betrayed his true hope. Obviously having his mind examined by an outside force had made his shields weak.

"None within the Death Eater ranks. All are totally faithful to the cause. I had been all alone in my beliefs until I realized you thought the same way."

Severus looked up at her, tearing his eyes away from the floor, and said incredulously, "You knew before you read my mind? How?"

Ignoring the second question, Lily murmured, "Only Muggles talk of 'mind-reading.' The mind is not a book, to be opened at will and examined at leisure. Thoughts are not etched in the inside of skulls, to be perused by any invader. The mind is a complex and many-layered thing-"

“How?” he repeated, cutting her off, though he had seemed to be absorbing what she said.

Lily sighed, “Not only did you give signs that you hated your father, thus his ideas too, but you also kept your mind shields up during breakfast.” Seeing and correctly interpreting Severus’s glance at the open door, she whispered, “Don’t worry. I doubt the Dark Lord would have paid enough attention to notice. Just don’t turn your back on him.”

Severus nodded hesitantly, obviously unnerved that a girl, a Gryffindor girl no less, was giving him instructions on how to trick the Dark Lord Voldemort into believing he was faithful.

“Come on. I still need to show you the other 125 rooms in the mansion.”

Lily and Severus met secretly the rest of the week. They were often to be found in the Nightshade Mansion kitchens, talking over a hot meal.

Tantakah Snape still hadn’t recovered. Lily had been right in assuming that he would be painfully punished. So many hexes had been placed on him he had been unrecognizable at first. His being stuck in bed allowed Severus and Lily to meet without drawing his attention.

Lily had discovered that Severus was much like her. He too had no choice but to serve Voldemort, disliked seeing death and torture, was skilled at Occlumency, hated the quartet of Gryffindor boys self-named the Marauders, and normally stayed emotionless, which was easy around the also emotionless Death Eaters. Lily wondered if she could stay that way if she met someone perky.

Lily had come to think of Severus as a friend, almost a brother, over the few days she had known him. She hated to admit that she was so needy of friends that her only one had been met through mutual mind-reading and the fact both of them had dirt on each other that neither wanted revealed to the Dark Lord. Not that she minded having Severus for a best friend, she just wished she had led a normal life.

It had startled how happy she had been to finally have someone she could act herself around. She could vent when she was angry and not have to worry that the Dark Lord would hear. Though she would never be skilled in talking about her deeper emotions, she could still show when she was confused (which was not often), annoyed, or just plain furious.

One morning, as they sat alone in the kitchens chatting about the Founders, a pair of regal looking owls swept through the open window, which was high enough to dissuade eavesdroppers, seeing as it was on the third floor. Each dropped a letter at either Severus's or Lily's plate and flew away just as swiftly as they had come.

Lily calmly ran a short, yet sharp, nail over the top and pulled out a thick parchment. Before she read the letter, she caught sight of the envelope. In bright emerald ink,

'Lily D. A. Evans

Large Bedroom in West Wing

Nightshade Mansion, Liverpool.'

'It's a good thing Dumbledore doesn't know the function of the Mansion,' thought Lily wryly.

Ignoring the base letter, Lily picked up her list of supplies. Each item was already owned by the girl, other than the optional Gryffindor scarf and the books.

She excused herself from Severus, who nodded in understanding, and headed to Voldemort's planning room, a small dark chamber on the second floor. Lily knocked cautiously on the thick door.

"I'm busy," hissed the Dark Lord from inside.

"My Lord, it is Li-Lady Velisna. I received my school letter. I just wanted to let you know I need to go to Diagon Alley soon," Lily said before turning to leave.

“Ah, Lady Velisna, come in. I’ve been meaning to speak with you.” The reply surprised Lily, but she entered anyways.

Lily tried to open the door, pulled out her wand, unlocked it and entered.

Voldemort was seated at a circular table in the center of the dimly lit room. Papers littered the table, some in strange colors, foreign languages or blueprints. Lily looked away from the building sketches, uneager to know which location would be invaded next.

“What do you think of young Snape?” he asked as soon as she looked up at him.

“I think he will be a welcome to our ranks. He has the will and courage. He would make a good spy,” Lily said honestly. She knew that if she gave any sign of being more than acquaintances with Severus he would be killed immediately, for the Dark Lord believed friendship was weakness.

“Hmm... I think I would first like to test him to see if he could be a field agent. Meet me in the Challenge room after dinner. Good day,” Voldemort said before returning his gaze to the parchments in front of him. Lily went back downstairs to warn Severus about the arduous test he was about to go through.

THANK YOU FOR THE REVIEWS. I LIKE WHERE THIS STORY IS GOING AND I HOPE YOU DO TOO.

Chapter 4: The Challenge

Lily led Severus to the Challenge Room, unease gathering in her stomach. She had been trained in that room.

Last year her teacher, Erik Rosse, had placed a Silencing Charm on her so she would get used to making no noise to walk or communicate.

Unfortunately, Rosse had never excelled in Silencing Charms so when it was taken off Lily could make no noise as she walked and her voice was permanently quiet. She could talk no louder than a loud mutter.

What more people figured a habit had gotten her in trouble at times. Her teachers had learned not to call on her on in class for they wouldn't be able to hear the answer and if she in need, she couldn't yell for help. Fortunately, she was on the side of the people who usually caused the trouble.

Before she knew it, her feet had led her and Severus to the door. Lily opened the door and entered, Severus following her closely. From what she had learned to read from his body language, he was nervous. He flinched slightly as the door slammed shut behind them.

Voldemort appeared from the shadows. "Snape, your goal is to make it through the course as quick as you can. Things will try to stop you, but you must deal with them efficiently. You may begin."

The room was enchanted to seem like the outdoors. Each obstacle, whether it was a wire fence, an enchanted indoor river or a row of thorny bushes, stretched from wall to wall.

Lily set off at a run, Severus behind. The first obstacle was a tall wire fence. Lily jumped up on it without halting her running so her momentum took her up many more handholds than she would have reached ordinarily.

Following her example the best he could, Severus too began climbing. Glancing down at her pupil, she saw him still at the bottom.

“You’ll need to be quicker,” whispered Lily, parallel to him on the other side of the fence.

His black eyes widened in surprise at her quick assent. She watched him pick up his pace, still looking nervously down at the rapidly receding ground.

Lily shot a glowing message in the air, knowing Severus wouldn’t be able to hear over what must have been a loud pounding in his ears.

‘Hurry up!’ the green sparks read. Severus shot her a frustrated glance and obeyed orders. The second he had joined her at the bottom she took off again.

Severus followed her to a shallow, yet icy river. They jumped in, walked across the slippery bottom. He was nearly swept away by the powerful current and only survived by reading Lily’s spark message of ‘Hold on to the stones’ and using his boot-clad feet to hold onto the river bottom.

As they continued, there were few mishaps other than Severus being much slower than Lily until they came to one of the rows of bushes. Lily leapt over them gracefully by turning into her red wolf Animagus form. A sleek animal, abnormally auburn and had eerily green eyes. She morphed back the second she got to the other side. Severus tried to jump over, but managed to get his foot caught in the thorns.

Turning as she heard his gasp of pain and saw the long thorns jab deeper into his foot. Blood welled from each long cut. Unable to assist, Lily simply gave one word of advice. “Diffindo,” she hinted to her pained student.

Severus pulled out his wand, aimed it at the branches surrounding his foot and repeated the incantation. The plant was cut up enough for him to slip his foot out.

Without bothering to pull the remaining spikes from his bleeding foot, the Slytherin began running off to the next obstacle. Lily raced

forward and caught up easily. Two simulated Aurors popped out from behind a row of shadowed trees.

Lily dislodged hers with a perfected Stunning Spell while Severus wiped his opponents memory so forcefully that the simulation sat down with a thump and stared dumbly into space.

Lily was pleased with Severus's choice of spell. Not only would that work very efficiently against any opponent, but most Death Eaters would have simply killed anyone in their path.

Near the end of the obstacle course, the bright candles snuffed out as though a giant had blown on them. Lily continued running, unconcerned by the pitch black for these were the kind of conditions she usually worked in.

Severus, however, seemed uncomfortable with it for she heard the swish of a wand and his familiar voice say, "Lumos."

A beam of light shot her. It illuminated a tree, then a bush, then the ground, then a huge rock wall looming in front of them. The light of Severus's wand moved with the pattern of his running arm so it was hard for him to focus on watching and running at the same time.

As Lily rapidly scaled the wall, using her instinct to guide her hand to the next stone, Severus tried unsuccessfully to climb with one hand. Then he tried to keep his wand behind his ear as he climbed. Lily's sharp ears heard a soft clatter as the wood hit the magicked grass.

Finally admitting defeat, Severus mumbled "Nox," and tried to climb the wall blindly.

Knowing she could help her pupil no further, Lily reached the top of the wall. She saw that, a few feet ahead, a zip line hung from the ceiling leading to the neon finish line. Lily sat on the wall, waiting for Severus to make his way up.

A thump and a groan resounded from below as Severus fell off the tall wall. With a sigh Lily sent another message, 'Time is of the essence.'

With what sounded like renewed determination, Severus began up the wall again. After ten minutes, Severus finally came panting up beside her.

“Now stand up and jump,” Lily instructed in a whisper.

From the eerie glow of the green zip lines, Lily could see the dim outline of Severus’s incredulous face as he repeated, “Jump? As in jump off the wall?”

“Like this,” she murmured. Lily leapt agilely to her feet and then, after balancing on the four-inch wide wall, took a flying leap. The girl grabbed the waiting bar and slid down the strong wire. Blackness swirled around her as the green finish line zoomed closer, leaving purple stains in her vision.

She dropped, did a somersault in mid-air and landed gracefully behind the finish line. After a moment of hesitation, Severus’s glowing bars began making its way swiftly down the line. Severus jumped off the line at finish line, but would have been injured if the fast-thinking Lily hadn’t conjured a pillow for his landing.

The candles lit up once again and Voldemort stepped forward. “The good news is that you survived. The bad news is that Lady Velisna made it in a fraction of your time on her first try. Maybe you are best at spy work. We’ll find something for you to do.”

Lily shook her head at the pitiful time and murmured to Severus, “You weren’t cut out for killing.”

Severus gave her a subtle nod and bowed low to the Dark Lord. “As long as there is some way I can please you, Master,” he said obediently.

Lily looked back over the Challenge Room, hating each familiar sight. She envied Severus; he would never again have to enter the room that had left such a silent impact. That night, the Dark Mark was burned into Severus’s forearm.

“We should probably go shopping for your supplies today,” Voldemort said carelessly over breakfast. The Snapes had left the previous day, as soon as Tantakah had been able to make the Apparation. Severus had promised her before they left that he would not forget her at school, giving Lily heart.

Lily nodded and swallowed a bite of bacon in her mouth. “Indeed,” she murmured.

“I think we should get you an owl. A fine goodbye present, don’t you think?”

Lily nodded cautiously. Finally, her own owl. “We can go now, before the crowds if you can get ready quickly,” said the Dark Lord.

Lily nodded, dabbed her lips with a silk napkin and rose. “Meet me outside the gates in ten minutes,” instructed Voldemort.

Lily nodded as she walked out. Even though he was now unofficially her father, Lily still harbored a slight fear of him. The standard black robes of a Death Eater would be inappropriate in Diagon Alley. Instead she chose a blood-red set that matched eerily with the highlights in her hair. She tugged her sleeve firmly over where her tattoo was coiled at the crook of her elbow.

Lily met her Lord outside the gate: exactly ten minutes later. Voldemort’s disguise consisted of dark blue robes covered in silver crescent moons and a pair of dark shades shades to hide red eyes. The duo of powerful beings Apparated simultaneously.

REVIEW!

Preview of next chapter:

Lily whirled around to glare at James Potter and Sirius Black.

Chapter 5: The Alleys

Lily blinked and found herself in a crowded street. Bustling witches and witches rushed by, off to do some unimportant errand or go have a double scoop Cherry Razzyberry Sundae. The redhead was disgusted and, by the look on his face, so was Lord Voldemort.

The Dark Lord, in his well-chosen disguise, beckoned for her to follow him into Gringotts; the only place anyone trusted their money.

Seeing as Lily had no money of her own, she was permitted to use the gold from the Dark Lord's vault which was listed under the false name of Marvolo Smith. Lily wondered how he had come up with such a name.

Once their money was collected from the vast safe far beneath London, Lily and the Dark Lord went to Flourish and Blotts to retrieve her books and a new quill and parchment. They bought the books quickly, splitting up so as to find the texts quicker than they would have together.

They got Potions supplies for Lily's dwindling kit and bought the latest thick-bottomed cauldron.

"Lady Velisna, go and get something to eat. I have some business to take care of. I'll find you," Voldemort said. Lily carried half the bags and Voldemort had the others. Lily nodded and set off.

As Voldemort went off to see a man about a hippogriff, Lily went to a little restaurant called Gillyweed Stew. Of course, they didn't actually serve Gillyweed Stew as it would have required them to fill the restaurant with water so the clients could breathe.

She tossed a strand of her waist-length hair that escaped from its ponytail over shoulder and sat at an empty table on the nearly vacant café. The only other customers were a trio of brown-robed workers from Flourish and Blotts who were obviously on their well-deserved lunch break.

Lily ordered a glass of green tea and gazed out the slightly dusty window. So absorbed was she with watching the mass of normal people on the bustling street that she didn't even hear the bell over the door ring as someone and didn't notice them until they sat beside her and one said, "Hello Evans."

Lily whirled around to glare at James Potter and Sirius Black. "Hello imbeciles," she murmured in return.

Both boys were tall, dark and handsome. Potter had unruly black hair that looked as though it had never been touched by a comb in his life. His soulful hazel eyes betrayed his emotions as easily as if they were written on his face. His naturally light skin had been tanned from all of his hours of Seeker training on the Gryffindor House Quidditch team.

Black was much like Potter; black hair, tan skin and a tall height. The Gryffindor Beater though had gray eyes that had a permanently observant look. Black was passionate about everything he did and it showed in his eyes. Lily always noticed eyes for it was her way of discovering thoughts. Currently, Black was looking annoyed by Lily's rudeness to his best friend. Lily had never met anyone who held up the loyalty part of Gryffindor qualities like this two boys.

Potter clutched his chest in mock pain, eyes glistening with humor. "Alas, Lily, my flower, my love, my angel: whilst you insult me I pine away for your exotic beauty."

Lily rolled her emerald eyes and resumed gazing out the window. Once Potter realized he was being ignored, he said, "Evans, now that you've had all summer to think about it, will you go out with me?"

The girl shook her head and continued looking away. With a sigh, Potter told Black that he was going to get some Butterbeers. The scraping of a chair alerted Lily to his exit.

"Evans." The sharp warning in Black's tone caused Lily to turn to him in surprise. His gray eyes glittered as though on fire. "Hurry up and go out with him. He's desperate. I know he's a good guy and though I want the best for him, he still wants to go out with you. We both know

you don't deserve him, but at least give him a chance." His observant gray eyes watched her closely for a reaction.

Lily closed her eyes in exasperation and slight sadness. Sadly, she knew that no matter how extremely arrogant Potter was and how much she hated him that he did deserve someone better than the Stunner of Lord Voldemort. She opened her eyes back, keeping them and her face clear. "I will never date Potter... or anyone else for that matter."

Black's voice rose slightly as his eyes narrowed as he ordered, "You will date him."

Lily felt uncontrolled fury rise in her. She had no choice but to obey Voldemort but she was not going to take orders from some pretty boy who had no right to boss her around. She raised an eyebrow. "Are you going to make me?" she said as loudly as she could.

"If I have to yes," growled Black. He pulled out his wand and pointed it straight at her. Lily felt like laughing at the weak threat and had her own wand out facing Black's before he knew it.

"Is that a fact? I'd like to see you try," she murmured. "You have no clue who you're dealing with."

Confusion showed briefly in his eyes at her reply. Suddenly two voices came from behind them. "What's going on here?" The mixture of one's deep voice that was full of confusion and the other's blank hiss caused Lily to freeze. Fear filled her as it had not when Black had been threatening her.

The hand that held her wand gave an uncontrollable twitch as her muscles tightened in apprehension. She masked her worry with a small smile as she turned to face the confused James Potter and the emotionless Dark Lord.

"Time to leave," stated Voldemort and he began striding towards the door. Lily gave one last longing look towards her unfinished tea but gathered her bags quickly and followed her adoptive father out the

door leaving Black, who watched her closely, and Potter, who was watching her confusedly with two Butterbeers in his hands, alone.

As they strode down the street, Voldemort said furiously, "Was that a Black and a Potter you sitting with?"

Lily whispered, "They sat down uninvited. I tried to get them to leave, but-

"Are either dead?" cut in Voldemort. Lily shook her head meekly. "You were alone with two blood traitors and they escaped alive? Maybe I haven't trained you well enough on what will happen if you don't follow orders or maybe... maybe you have a soft spot for one of them." The suspicion that cut through his normally fatherly voice scared Lily more than the actual words spoken, though those instilled fear too.

"I didn't want to endanger the cause by murdering them in the restaurant. I have no feelings for either of them," Lily said, meeting his eyes and letting the truth show in hers.

The duo stopped the Magical Menagerie. The other place would be headed would most likely not have owls unless they breathed fire or secreted a poison.

Lily entered alone. Voldemort couldn't bring himself to be in the same store as something with a name like 'puppy.'

In the back of the shop was a special room for owls. The birds of prey were everywhere. Small ones, big ones, fluffy ones, sleek ones, brown ones, white ones, ones with colors so vibrant that you had to avert your eyes were all over the place.

Then Lily spotted it. An owl that would meet her eyes. It was black, but the lights from the candles above and the reflection of a neon green bird beside it caused it to be more colors than countable. From the look in its intelligent amber eyes, Lily could tell its ego had taken a bruising from being stuck with the idiotic owls around it.

She whistled softly, one low note then a longer, higher one. The owl seemed to know that she was asking for it carefully hopped onto her hand.

Lily stroked its black plume softly, knowing she had made the right choice. She bought it from an eager salesman who assured her it was a pureblood and a wonderful owl.

By the time Lily had gotten back to Lord Voldemort, she had chosen the perfect name for it. "Meet Nightshade, my lord."

Their next stop was a dark line of shops known to attract some not-so-nice customers: Knockturn Alley.

First they stopped in The Lethifold, a dreary looking shop sandwiched in between The Dead Drive-In and Haunted Hallucination, a Muggle drug shop.

Inside the dingy store were rows and rows of murder weapons. It was always useful to have a few daggers or guns on you if your wand was taken away. Very few wizards realized this and were often doomed the moment their wand was out of their hand.

Voldemort bought a set of thin wrist daggers while Lily settled for the outlawed Instant Portkey. Once the Instant Portkey touched an object, you were required to state a location and it would take you there immediately. They were outlawed due to the fact they helped criminals make quick getaways in spite of anti-Apparation spells.

As they walked out of the store after paying, Voldemort looked at a store across the street and asked, "Would you like a broom, Vel?"

Lily looked at the shop in question. Black-Market Black Brooms displayed many fine-quality broomsticks, most not even sold on mass market. She nodded carefully, not daring to get her hopes up.

"Come on, then," said her adoptive father, walking to the store. A - looking man came from the back. "Can I help you?" he asked insolently.

Voldemort hissed, "I want the best broom here."

The brown-haired man scoffed. "Like you could pay for it?"

Voldemort whipped out his wand and off his sunglasses simultaneously. "The Dark Lord has an endless supply of Galleons," he said harshly.

Instantly the man became all smiles. "Of course, Master. If you want our best, I suggest you take the Black Phoenix. One-of-a-kind speed, perfect braking, balanced like you wouldn't believe, strong enough to hold up a troll. Only 100,000,000 Galleons and she can be yours."

The number made Lily's eyes widen slightly. Voldemort, however, seemed unfazed. "How about 10,000 Galleons and I spare your worthless life?" he said coldly.

The salesman nodded hurriedly, shoved the box into Voldemort's hands and scurried away without the money. Voldemort laughed, a cold, high-pitched sound and turned to Lily. "Vel, don't open it yet. Wait until you get to school."

Lily nodded and stowed it in the bag that held her cauldron under Nightshade's cage. Sometimes being the Dark Lord had its perks.

Review! This was a fun chapter to write. Sirius is cool. We will have his POV and Severus's POV soon for just a chapter at a time.

Chapter 6: The Hogwarts Express

The rest of the summer at Nightshade Mansion was nothing special. Almost nightly raids kept Lily all day: planning, practicing, executing. The girl felt Voldemort's affection for her growing and she found that she was beginning to understand him. Still, her encounter with Black and Potter had reminded her of who he was.

The morning before she left the Mansion for her 7th year in Hogwarts was dark and rainy. The continual explosions of thunder had awoken Lily, shaking her from an insane dream in which she and Petunia were arguing about the different flavors of jellybeans and who liked them better.

Though Lily's mind was slow with the lingering sleep, she realized it was her last day in Nightshade Mansion until the summer. Voldemort always made her go to the homes of different Death Eaters over the holidays so no curious student could follow her and discover where she lived. At one time Lily had thought the idea was insane, but she had realized that the threat of someone following her home was very real when the Marauders had inquired as to where she lived one Christmas.

She decided to get dressed and do some last minute packing before dawn.

Voldemort and his daughter Apparated to the train station swiftly, knowing it was best to be early than late. After appearing in a secluded back alley by the station, the strange duo, one with a black owl in a cage, walked straight through the barrier.

Already pulled up in the station was a long, scarlet train that gleaming in the electric lights of the station and looked perfectly blended in the Muggle surroundings.

Lily saw only two other families on the platform, for very few arrived so early. The Prewetts and the Blacks.

The Prewetts consisted of two good-natured 6th year Gryffindor twins named Fabian and Gideon. The Blacks were made of the two

disdainful parents, one son who was copying their stances and one son who looked as though he's like nothing better than to wipe the smirks off their faces with either a few spells or a hot pan.

They were right next to the Black clan. Voldemort was eyeing the youngest son in slight recognition: he must have been a trainee Death Eater. The boy, Regulus, noticed Lily standing beside him first. He sniffed as though he had suddenly caught whiff of something most disgusting. "Watch your step, mudblood."

Before Lily had time to respond, Voldemort had stepped in front of her. "If you have anything rude to say about my adoptive daughter, say it to me. Did you want to say more?" He glared at the boy over his sunglasses, showing off his hypnotic red eyes.

Regulus Black shook his head fearfully and backed away. Lily looked away from Voldemort, who was still glaring at Regulus, to see Sirius Black staring at her curiously.

The Dark Lord walked her over to the train and slid the heavy trunks in the luggage compartment easily before saying farewell. "See you next summer, Vel. Owl me often." Then he took her completely off guard by giving her a swift pat on the shoulder, the first physical sign of affection he had ever shown.

"Goodbye," she murmured before entering the first empty compartment she found. Nightshade hooted softly as they sat down but soon Lily was busy clearing her mind of all emotion, keeping her Occlumency skills up to date and the ebony owl was asleep.

When the train first jolted into motion, Lily was startled aware. She was surprised that she hadn't noticed the sounds of the now tanner students outside. Her compartment was still thankfully empty.

As though her thinking this had spread the news, a knock sounded on the door.

Lily sighed, rose and unlocked the door. Outside was who she assumed to be Severus, but he was looking rather odd. "Er, Severus? Where's your face?"

A disembodied voice came from behind the curtains of greasy black hair. "The Gryff jerks made it invisible. A little help, please?"

Lily motioned him inside and closed the door behind them. She quickly muttered the counter-spell and murmured a simple, "Your welcome." Once Severus's relieved face came back into view, Lily asked, "How did they get you so fast?"

"The second, the very second, I got on the train they were there. Is it their goal to make my life miserable?"

Lily smirked. "I think its their goal to make everyone's life miserable."

Severus shook his head in amusement, not one for laughing out loud. "It's good to see you again, Velisna."

Lily sighed softly. "Just 'Lily', okay? I don't need any reminding during school."

Severus nodded his understanding. Then he got a thoughtful look on his face. "Maybe I should call you Evans. If you truly want your identity safe, perhaps we should only meet in private."

"In the kitchens? Every...Wednesday night. We can talk on the weekends too."

"Like old times?" Severus asked with a hint of a smile on his face.

"Like old times," Lily confirmed with a nod.

Turning the talk away from this potentially happy conversation, Severus asked politely, "What did you do the rest of the summer?"

Lily sighed, and answered, "Raids. Tons of raids. You know, I've lost track of the people I've Stunned and killed over these past few years. I hate it," she whispered harshly.

Severus looked at her calmly, pity showing in his normally empty eyes. "Look, Lily. I-"

The compartment door burst open and in slinked Rudolphus Lestrange, Bellatrix Black, Bo Crabbe and Regulus Black; all had their wands pointed directly at Lily. Severus attempted to rise but Lily shook her head.

"Listen, mudblood, and listen well. We want the truth. Was that really the Dark Lord?" hissed Bellatrix. Though she was the only girl in the group, it was obvious by her tone and posture that she was the leader.

"You might not want to speak so loudly. Anyone could hear you," whispered Lily calmly.

Bellatrix went on as though she had not been interrupted. "I told Regulus that it couldn't have been, for the Dark Lord would never adopt a mudblood like you. Red eyes does not the Dark Lord make."

"You should have listened to my advice," Lily interrupted coldly. Using the wandless Dark Magic (a subcategory of the Dark Arts) that Voldemort had taught her, she the air with both hands and sent the four Death Eater wannabes and held them there. Sweat rolled down her face for the concentrated magical energy and concentration was very tiring.

"Yes, it was the Dark Lord. No one else but him has red eyes. He adopted me and named me Lady Velisna. Any more stupid questions?"

"Prove it!" spat Bellatrix, the only one of the Slytherins with the guts, or stupidity, to talk.

Lily slowly rolled her left sleeve. There, slithering down her forearm was the snake tattoo. "No ordinary 'mudblood' has the Mark of Salazar!" Lily hissed quartet of pinned Slytherins shivered as though the name was a bucket of ice water trickling down their backs.

She tightened her force around their throats, finally able to use the tricks for a good reason. Normally her job was to quietly Stun, but she always found true fighting more fun. "Now promise never to repeat a word of this or I may just squeeze too tight."

“O...kay!” the group gasped almost simultaneously. Bellatrix simply narrowed her heavily hooded eyes. Lily tightened her hold on the black haired girl’s slender neck. “Fine!” she choked out, panic filling her eyes.

Lily dropped them all, but none managed to land on the chairs below, instead becoming a heap on the floor. As they rose to their feet, Lily murmured, “If I ever hear even the slightest rumor that you have told people who I am I will, along with my father, kill you and your families.” The Slytherins nodded quickly before scampering out of the room. “Well, that should cover it,” said Lily, pleased by the obedient reactions shown by her Voldemort’s key Death Eater recruiters at Hogwarts.

“Awesome,” said Severus from where he was still seated. “Why don’t you do that when the Marauders pick on you?”

Lily gave a short derisive laugh. “I think that the Dark Arts are banned from school grounds.”

Severus looked put out, which was more emotion than he usually showed. It did him good to have someone to talk to. “I could teach you how to do it, though,” Lily offered.

“Definitely,” Severus nodded. “We could practice in the Forbidden Forest, seeing as the house elves won’t want us dueling in their domain.”

Lily felt a smile threaten to cross her lips as the mental image of warrior house elves chasing them out of the castle popped into her mind. The duo chatted casually for a while until Lily said, “Can you keep a secret?”

Severus nodded in confusion. Everything they talked about was a secret. “Well, after Lord Vo... the Dark Lord adopted me, I’ve started growing fond of him, but then...” Lily proceeded to tell Severus about the events with Black and Potter in Diagon Alley. “Now I know he cares about me, but he scares me. If I do something wrong, no matter how much of a daughter I am to him, he will kill me anyways and if

I'm perfect then he'll still love me as a daughter. I'm so... lost. What will he do when- if- I escape? I... I don't want him to hate me."

She covered her face with her hands and set her elbows on her knees, a sign of hopelessness that she hadn't exhibited in years. A cautious hand patted her back. "It's okay. We'll deal with it as it comes. Trust me, he won't hate you."

Lily looked up at Severus, her emerald eyes covered in a light sheen of rigidly withheld tears. She let a shaky breath and nodded, "If you say so..."

"I do," said the boy softly, encouraging his only friend.

Lily wiped at her eyes, angry she had shown such weakness. "It's just human," said Severus, as though reading thoughts. "Everyone has feelings."

"Not Lady Velisna," Lily muttered harshly.

Severus took her pale hand and murmured, "Even Lady Velisna."

Suddenly, the compartment door, which had stayed unlocked and forgotten after their rendezvous with the Slytherins, burst open. In all their glory, the Marauders looked in curiously.

Don't worry; Severus just thinks of Lily as a FRIEND. That was NOT a sign of deeper feelings. Grrr... Anyways, please review!

Chapter 7: Confrontations

Potter's eyes darted from Severus's hands resting on Lily's and quickly pulled out his wand. Lily rose in fury. She could feel her power gathering inside of her. Potter thought that her anger was directed towards somebody else. "Don't worry, Evans. We won't let him bother you ag-" Potter said soothingly, the arrogant knight in shining armor.

"Excuse me?" she hissed, so strongly that it caused Potter to back up a step. "Just because you don't like him doesn't mean everything he does is evil. He was simply showing me the art of palm-reading. No doubt going to try to scare me with nonsense about my life ending with You-Know-Who.

"Goodbye, Snape. Thank you," Lily whispered, motioning Snape through the door that Marauders had vacated as they entered the room.

"Later, mudblood," came the reply as the Slytherin was swept out of the compartment.

Potter took a step towards Lily. "Let me see your hands."

"No!" The sharpness in Lily's quiet voice made Potter stop. Lily had just spotted a certain tattoo lounging in her left palm, and quickly stuck her hands in her pockets.

"Okay..." He nodded to his Marauders and they all sat down. He took a deep breath and spoke as though he had been rehearsing his lines for weeks. "Evans, I'm sorry if we got you in trouble with your dad."

"Adoptive dad," Black piped in, looking to Lily for confirmation. His interruption of what was sure to be a well-thought out and meaningful apology earned him a glare from his messy haired companion.

"Yeah," she agreed in a whisper, even quieter than usual.

Pettigrew spoke for the first time, "What happened to your parents?" His tactlessness was appalling.

She hadn't told anyone (save Severus) about her parents, and she wasn't about to start now. "I'd rather not talk about it." Lily was surprised to find a faint quiver in her firm voice.

Even the mere thought of Jenny and Parker Evans was enough to make her icy heart bleed anew. She had been able to keep her thoughts away from them since that fateful day when she lost her family, so every reminder of them sent fresh daggers flying into her soul.

She swiftly pushed her thoughts into a secluded room in her mind and locked the door. Taking a small, steadying breath, she glared at the self-named Marauders and hissed as loud as she could, "Get out."

Black laughed and nudged the silent Lupin with his foot. "Hey Moony, did you hear that? Thought not. You can't tell whether she's really talking or not!" His taunting, something she had been blissfully free of that summer, made Lily's cold blood boil.

"Get out now," she spat.

Black laughed. "Now she babbles! What's a sauerkraut cow?" The other three joined in the laughter, but all Lily could see was Black's mocking face. Oh, what she wouldn't do to be able to get her hands on his throat.

She felt her eyes heat up, then saw Black turn pale and clutch at his neck as though choking and she snapped out of her blind rage. Why hadn't she remembered Voldemort's warning? The more often you use your power, the quicker it will come to you, and sometimes without your conscious drawing of them.

"Padfoot? Hey, Padfoot, you okay?" Lupin was asking worriedly, amber eyes showing surprise and fear.

Lily blocked the power by closing her eyes and looking to the floor. At once there came the sounds of a gasp followed by heavy breathing. "What happened?" came Potter's voice.

Lily looked back up to see Black rubbing his throat. "I dunno. I just started... choking."

Lily decided it was time to leave. Potter noticed her departure. "Where are you going?" No response came from the redhead, who was blanking out all emotion from her mind rapidly. She hoped they couldn't hear the raggedness of her breathing as fear clenched her heart.

Lily found a compartment with three annoying third year Hufflepuffs and sat down. By the time the train had come to a stop, Lily's ears were scarred by the high-pitched giggles and utterly ridiculous gossip.

She got off the train lightly and watched the thestral-drawn carriages arrive through a light drizzle. The girl went up to one carriage and stroked the black, skeletal head of one of the thestrals and got in the carriage. Already inside were Maggie DiCente and her boyfriend George Frederick, both fifth year Gryffindors and the sixth year Hufflepuff Amos Diggory.

"May I sit here?" Lily asked quietly.

Diggory obliged, scooting over to make room. Lily held Nightshade's cage in her lap as the carriages glided forward.

After a minute or so of peaceful silence, Diggory asked, "So, Lily, how was your summer?"

"Ah, same old, same old. My neighborhood built a new pool and I swam there all summer," Lily lied easily.

"Awesome. My father and I practiced for the Quidditch season most of the time. I think Hufflepuff'll win this year," Diggory bragged, brushing his curly brown hair out of his tan face.

"Most impressive," Lily whispered. "What broom do you have?"

Diggory puffed out his chest proudly. "A Silver Arrow II. The only brooms better are illegal."

Lily smiled inwardly. Sometimes being the daughter of the Dark Lord had its perks.

Does that end sentence look familiar? The next chapter is dedicated to the first person to tell me where else I have that written (in this story or my others).

Looking over this, I realized that this has several of the same things that happened in Ch. 2 of Pride, which I just wrote/posted last weekend. Scarily enough, I wrote this chapter in June (I already have written, but not typed, the next 15 chapters). PLEASE REVIEW!

The Great Hall was lit brightly by beautiful candles, each floating around the four House tables, magically not dropping wax on any unsuspecting student.

Lily took her seat at the nearly full Gryffindor table, close enough to a group of girls so as not to look suspicious, but far enough away so as not to invite any unwanted conversation with a girl she might end up being ordered to kill.

Unfortunately, the moment she sat down, a certain quartet of boys glided onto the bench next to her. Black placed himself in between Potter and Lily protectively.

Potter ruffled his hair. "So, Evans, my bittersweet babe. I never got around to asking you out on the train, so will you go with me, to Hogsmeade, on the next trip?"

Lily, having mastered the skill, rolled her eyes and shook her head 'no' simultaneously.

"Oh well, I'll just ask again later." Potter's mere voice caused Lily to clench her petite fists.

She turned her attention to the stage so she could watch for the first years. Suddenly, Potter said, "Hey, Evans! Do you want to go out with me?"

Black, Lupin and Pettigrew chortled. "Nice," said Black. Lily simply continued to watch the group of first years that had been ushered on stage.

All looked absolutely terrified except one determined brown-haired girl. Chin raised up, she glared at the Sorting Hat as though daring it to put her in any unworthy House.

Professor McGonagall, who was looking quite sharp with her strict expression and high bun, began calling named of the first years. First, 'Aren, Bill' was sorted into Slytherin. Lily clapped softly for the trembling first year.

The list seemed to go on and on. When the brown-haired girl stepped to the front, Lily watched carefully. "Tonks, Nymphadora," called McGonagall.

The Sorting Hat sat on her head for a few moments and finally shouted, "Gryffindor!"

Poor thing. Lily had been hoping she would have been a pureblood Slytherin. She had the guts needed for greatness.

The brown-haired girl took off the hat with a shaky hand, set it down on the stool and strode resolutely towards the Gryffindor Table. She sat down across from Lily and turned her attention back to the stage after being congratulated heartily by the Marauders.

Once all the kids had been Sorted, Dumbledore rose. "Before I give you all a feast, I have news for you. Over the summer, the Dark Lord Voldemort" (a collective gasp ran through the crowd and muggleborn first-years were quickly filled in by their peers), "has gained more power and support. Too many people have died because and by the orders of this man. Children have been left orphans, women have been made widows. Do not, however think that he only kills men. The only way to stop him from getting you is to not be at home when he arrives. If you ever fear that the Dark Lord is on your, or your family's, trail, inform me and I will find a safe place for you to hide.

"Even more troubling news has reached my ears. Voldemort has hired a Stunner."

From the stunned silence that followed, a muggleborn first-year called, "What's a Stunner?"

Dumbledore sighed. "A Stunner is the person who goes into the victims' houses and Stuns that occupants before the killing Death Eaters can murder the people. The name of this new Stunner has not been uncovered yet, but we do know that it is a very powerful wizard and he needs to be caught. Do not let yourself get within spell range of a Stunner, for all of their Stunning spells have the ability to knock their victim to the brink of death. Only an equally powerful Enervate can wake them."

“Why do they need a Stunner? Don’t the Death Eaters just all anyways?” asked a person from the Hufflepuff table.

“Stunners are used for a number of reasons: they can stop the occupants from screaming and alerting others, then can help abduct people that are to be questioned or killed later.

“As I said before, Stunners either Stun to kill or kidnap. Though kidnapping may not seem so bad, torture can be used to extract information from the victims. Do not let yourself get near to a Stunner,” Dumbledore repeated, blue eyes deadly serious.

Lily watched him closely, face showing nothing of the emotions inside. It shocked her to see the smart, strong Headmaster fearing her. He thought Voldemort’s Stunner was some old, experienced wizard, not some seventeen year old Gryffindor girl.

She had nearly laughed aloud when he had said they would be safe under his protection. She hadn’t seen him show up the day that her family was killed. Where had he been when she had been forced to Stun hundreds over the past five years?

“Now, enough talk of darkness. Let our merriment and feast commence!” he said, smiling as he raised his hands to alert the house-elves to send up the food.

Lily turned from the stage and began putting food on her plate. As everyone else stuffed themselves, Lily picked at her food, appetite ruined by the fear she had seen in everyone’s eyes as they had beard of her.

“Hi I’m Nymphadora Tonks call me Tonks what’s your name?” said a voice quickly. Lily looked up to see the brown-haired girl... but her hair wasn’t brown anymore. It was now short and blond with magenta highlights.

“I’m Lily Evans,” the redhead whispered. “Wasn’t your hair-”

“Brown? Yeah, I’m a Metamorphmagus,” explained the now blond-haired Tonks. She shut her eyes tightly and suddenly her face was heart-shaped and her hair long and black.

Lily’s eyes widened; she had read about those. “You were born with it, right? Could you do it as a baby, or did you have to learn it? Or...” Lily trailed off as she realized that the spunky girl had drawn out her true personality.

“So,” came the mischievous voice of Black, “the ice queen finally cracks. And to think it was my own cousin,” he said happily, if not enviously.

“Don’t count on it,” Lily said flatly, putting on her blank mask again. Seeing Black’s raised brow, Lily argued quietly, “I was just interested you say cousin?”

Tonks replied, “Actually, it’s second cousin, but we’re tight anyways. Do you know each other?”

“Sadly, yes,” the two Gryffindors said simultaneously, only to turn and glare at each other.

“You aren’t friends?” asked Tonks disheartedly.

“I don’t need friends,” said Lily softly.

“I don’t need friends like her,” said Black at the same time.

Potter, who was on the other side of Sirius, said, “Nymphie, they’re in denial. “They’re really the bestest of best friends.”

Black glared at Potter and aimed a smack at his head, but Potter ducked just in time. “You know me too well,” Black mumbled.

As Potter laughed and joked back, Lily turned her attention back to her plate.

“I would smack you, but I’d have to lean too far. My name is not Nympie!” Tonks said to Potter.

Ignoring the young girl's shouts, Lily picked up a roll and began tearing it into little pieces and chewing slowly. She was leaving her stomach slightly empty for dessert; the one delicacy that Nightshade Mansion didn't serve.

"Is Sirius really that bad?" asked Tonks, obviously directing the inquiry to Lily.

"Not as bad as Potter," Lily lied softly. She didn't know why, but she felt a bond with the first year. And, to her confusion, she didn't want to be the one who drove a wedge between Black and his little cousin. She guessed it was because she caused so much destruction over the summer that her subconscious Gryffindor didn't want to create more.

Tonks seemed to believe her, but then realized what was left out. "And how bad is James?"

Lily sighed. Tonks would have made a great Slytherin. Lily glanced over at Potter to see if she could find some way to answer Tonks' question kindly, but saw, instead of a well-behaved gentleman, who never did anything wrong, a guffawing idiot who was telling Lupin something that caused the mature Marauder to chuckle along.

"He's an idiot," Lily said in response to Tonks' question. "Potter is a bully, a rule-breaker, a heart-breaker and, worst of all, a Marauder." There, thought Lily triumphantly, that was a kind understatement.

"Did he break your heart?" Tonks asked softly. Obviously, her observation skills were as good as Black's, but she didn't pick up on the real reason Lily loathed James.

Lily scoffed and said, "Him? Break my heart? Yeah, right."

Black, who had heard Tonks' question, looked at Lily and growled, "What heart?"

“Sirius!” reprimanded Tonks sharply, smacking him lightly on the arm. The Gryffindor Beater chuckled affectionately and turned around to engage Potter into conversation.

“So, what did James do to you?” asked Tonks curiously.

Lily, for once, was at a loss for words. Then it all poured out. “He makes fun of me, pranks me, asks me out, bullies all the other students.” Lily stopped for a second to get her breath and the quiet flow of insults paused.

“He asks you out,” repeated Tonks incredulously, “and you’re offended?”

Lily sighed at her ignorance. “He asks me out just to annoy me. He doesn’t even have to worry about me saying yes.” Tonks still didn’t seem to understand. “It’s just another way to taunt me.”

“If you say so,” she said resignedly. Changing the subject so quickly that Lily almost didn’t catch on, Tonks said, “Watch this!”

She suddenly was pale, had a smooth beauty that shined with radiance. Then she changed her hair long and auburn and her eyes emerald green. Lily was staring at her reflection.

Instead of being disgusted, Lily was astounded. “That’s amazing,” said Lily honestly.

Tonks morphed back to her blond and pink highlighted self. “You think?” she asked, proud though she had heard the praise often.

Lily nodded in affirmation. “Changing the subject again,” Lily asked, “are you a pureblood?”

Tonks bristled, “My dad’s a Muggle. Do have a problem with it?” She had obviously prepared herself for any insults she might receive due to her blood.

Lily shrugged, “Both my parents were Muggles, so, no, I don’t have a problem with it.”

“Were?” asked Tonks casually, catching Lily off-guard. Lily froze, not sure of how to answer.

The girl looked down and saw that the table was laden with dessert. Deciding not to answer Tonks’ question, Lily began filling her plate: a slice of chocolate cake, apple pie, pumpkin bread, a scoop of blackberry cobbler, vanilla ice cream and a couple of brownies.

She looked back up to see Tonks still staring at her expectantly. Finally answering her question, Lily nodded silently, unaware of the observant gray eyes watching from beside her.

Whoa, this story has such long chapters! I need 10 reviews to update again!

That night, Sirius rested on his bed, thinking. He did that; relaxed going over facts in his head and trying to solve life's problems.

There was something up with Evans. Her parents were dead. Sirius had never heard even the slightest rumor of that, so it was obviously a well-kept secret. The girl also had an adoptive father who frightened her. Sirius had seen her twitch when he had come up behind them in the Gillyweed Café.

She had gone from a loud, fun-loving first year, to a quiet, shy, yet temperamental second year. It must have been that summer that Evans' parents had died.

Most suspicious of all, the Slytherins seemed to know why. Sirius, being observant as he was, had noticed the slimy gits watching her, talking to her.

What truly worried Sirius was that he knew her coldness towards people wasn't heartfelt. Her ice exterior was nothing but a shield to hide her true self behind. He had seen the real Lily Evans when she had protected people from being bullied by him and his friends, as she had talked to his cousin at dinner, how she worked hard in class to prove she was smart.

No, Lily had a distant façade at all times and Sirius intended to get behind that mask and find the true Lily Evans. Once he told James about his observations, the love-struck stag was sure to help.

He brushed back his curtains and looked over at Prong's four-poster bed. "Hey, James, are you still awake?" he whispered as loud as he dared.

He heard a sigh and the curtains flew open to reveal James sitting up on his bed, with his bedside candle lit. "Of course; I'm still working on that Potions essay for Sluggy. What's up?"

"One sec," Sirius replied, before rolling over and opening the curtains on the other side of his bed to check on Remus. When he looked over, Remus had already thrown open the curtains and had his wand lit. "Good, now Moony, can you come over here for a second?"

The werewolf looked down at the floor between his bed and Sirius'. On his half of the floor, there was naught but clean white carpet. However, Sirius' side looked as though it contained every piece of clothing Sirius owned lying inside out among a gargantuan amount of quills, torn parchments and old textbooks. He looked up and met Sirius' eyes with a smirk. "I don't think I can make it!"

The boy scowled and turned back to James. "Come over here, I have a plan."

In an instant, both of the Marauders were perched on the edge of Sirius' bed, eagerly awaiting the latest scheme. "Guys, this week's LE is LE."

The smiles dropped off the boys' faces immediately and they blinked together. "What?" asked Remus in confusion.

"So I have to spell everything out for you? This week's Latest Enigma is Lily Evans. Not that hard, Professor Werenius Lupin," Sirius said with a impatient sigh.

"Evans?" asked James with a happy grin.

"Yes, James," said Sirius slowly, "Lily Evans. Haven't you guys noticed anything, I dunno, strange about her?"

"Other than that she is amazing duelist for a short girl?" asked Remus with a shudder, no doubt recalling the numerous times in past years that the Marauders had been hospitalized when Miss Evans had lost her icy mask. The most memorable one had involved one hive of really mad bees and some misplaced honey that happened to end up interwoven in the Marauders' hair.

James answered, "Or that she's utterly gorgeous? Her emerald eyes, her fiery hair, her ruby lips, her pearl skin, her-"

"No," said Sirius, "I mean about her personality. Anything weird?"

“She doesn’t talk much,” offered Remus, “and she seems to think before she does anything. Almost like she’s afraid that someone’s-”

“Watching her, I know,” said Sirius. “That’s what I was thinking.”

“Do you have to keep interrupting us?” asked Remus wearily.

“Yes, but as I was saying, I think I figured out who’s watching Evans,” said Sirius.

“If anyone’s messing with her, I’ll hex them into next year, you just watch,” growled James. Once James got attached to someone, he wasn’t going to let any harm come to them, no matter how much they seemed to ‘dislike’ him.

Sirius nodded, “Well, I think it’s her stepfather. She only started acting like this in second year, which is probably when her parents died. I think if we figure out for sure who it is and why, we can help her. It’s the Gryffindor thing to do.”

“I’m in,” said Remus.

“Me too,” said James.

“Good, now what we have to do is become friends with her. Get her to trust us, see? We already have Tonks, so that’ll be real helpful. Then we just have to get her to tell us!” Sirius finished.

“Isn’t that butting into her business?” asked Remus warily.

“Sure, but we’re just being curious. And it will help her.”

Curiosity killed the cat, but it never did anything to the dog.

This was really short, but that’s because I’m going to update quickly. Think of it as an addition to the previous chapter. REVIEW!

Lily awoke the next morning to her roommates scurrying about, trying to unpack all the make-up they had neglected to set up the night before. Lily sat on top of her covers, curtains drawn back and watching their antics in disgust.

“Where’s my Succulent Strawberry lip gloss?” screeched Jessica Fairfield, rummaging through her make-up bag. Fairfield was tall, blond and had a daft obsession with boys. Lily had once caught a glimpse of her diary (pink with frilly, white lace) and saw that the main words were ‘Siri-poo’, ‘hair’ and ‘snogging.’

Jennifer Parker, a brunette of medium height and the leader of the clique, said, “Cool is, Jess. I’m borrowing it today, okay?” Parker was Fairfield’s best friend and just as daftly obsessed with the opposite gender. They often kept Lily up late at night with their ear-burning gossip and stories.

“Jess, can I use your Unicorn eye shadow? It would match so great with, like, my fuzzy earrings,” Jillian Storeman said, holding up the aforementioned earrings and jar of eye shadow pleadingly.

The three Js were Lily’s dorm mates. They looked down on anyone who either a) didn’t wear make-up, b) had never dated a Marauder, c) wasn’t pureblood, or d) didn’t worship the ground that their favorite band, the Groovy Hippogriffs, walked on. Sadly, Lily did not fit in any of the said four categories and, not only had she not dated a Marauder, she had never dated anyone at all. Oh, the horrors.

They enjoyed helping the Marauders prank Lily. If any prank happened in the girls’ dormitory, they all knew that the Js were to blame... not that anyone was going to turn them in.

Lily promised herself that this year, her last year before going into a full-time job as Voldemort’s Stunner, she would not stand for it. Even if she had to send a few of the girls to Hospital Wing permanently Stunned, then she would do it. The pranks would not continue this year.

Lily rose, grabbed her robes and set off to the bathroom, ducking the flying cover-up, lipstick and mascara.

She changed quickly into the school uniform, brushed her teeth and fixed her hair into the sleek ponytail with one quick spell and snuck back into the dormitory.

The Js had their uniforms on and were trying on the most outrageous jewelry to make themselves more noticeable.

Fairfield had on almost one hundred silver bracelets dangling from her wrist and a similarly layered necklace, while the other two girls were trying on things such as parrot shaped earrings to dragon-like pins.

Lily quickly grabbed her packed bookbag and made for the door.

“Hey, Evans!” called Parker. “Don’t you need some make-up? A face like that needs to be covered!” The brunette laughed and tossed her layered hair over on shoulder.

Lily froze at the door. “Coveraso!” yelled Parker through fits of uncontrolled laughter. Lily turned slowly to the girls before bringing up her pale hands to feel her face; It was caked in a thick layer of powder and her hand was smudged with red lipstick as she brought it away from her lips.

“Did it take you all summer to think of that one?” hissed Lily coldly. “Cleanaso!” The girl cast the spell over herself and the trio of girls. Instantly, every face was clear of make-up.

It took the girls about three seconds to absorb what had just happened. “Oh my gosh! We’re going to be late for class!” yelled Storeson as she raced around, trying to relocate the make-up she had so painstakingly applied earlier that morning.

“You’ll pay for this, Evans!” called Parker to her retreating back.

Halfway down the stairs, a head poked out of the first-year dorm. It was Tonks, with her hair still in blond and pink striped form. “What did you do?” she asked in amazement, for the shrieks of the Js could still be heard.

"I ruined their make-up," said Lily dryly. Seeing Tonks' incredulous look, Lily sighed, "You'll get used to it. Are you coming down for breakfast?"

Tonks' face fell. "Sorry, but Sirius and James promised to show me the way down so I wouldn't get lost. See you later?"

"I was just asking whether you were coming or not," said Lily, voice still emotionless.

Somehow, however, Tonks was able to pick up on the well-disguised coldness emitting from Lily and said, "Do you know where the library is? I wanted to stop by there during the break, but I know that the boys haven't been there before. Do you think you could show me where it is?"

Lily knew that Tonks was attempting to calm her, but she felt lightened either way. "Sure," she murmured coolly, "I was planning on stopping by there anyways. I'll take you there after lunch."

Tonks looked relieved. "Thanks, Lily, I owe you one." As Tonks ducked back into her room, Lily headed to the Great Hall.

The portraits of Hogwarts castle were so bright after a summer at Nightshade Mansion that Lily had to look away. The lack of green was disconcerting because the only time she saw other colors was when she was in a victim's home. She shook the thought from her head and kept her gaze averted from the walls.

When Lily reached the Great Hall, the ceiling showed that the day was bright and sunny. Very few students had migrated downstairs for breakfast so far, so Lily took a seat at the end of the nearly vacant Gryffindor table.

She ate leisurely, knowing she had plenty of time before class started. Slowly, more students filtered into the Hall, most with shuffling feet and excessive yawning.

Feeling boredom wash over her, she pulled a book out of her backpack called Animagus which spoke of the symptoms one showed when transformed. It was amazing really; your animal was chosen by your personality, and then once you successfully were able to transform, the personalities of that animal were heightened even greater in you. It said that the reason Lily craved a family was because her Animagus was a wolf, a pack animal. A lone wolf cries alone.

She continued reading, hardly paying attention to her food. Lily had no time to read at the Mansion for every free moment was spent sleeping. She prayed for the year to go by slowly to let her have time to enjoy freedom before she had a full-time life at the Nightshade Mansion.

“Hey, Lily!” called Tonks jubilantly from behind her. Lily casually marked her page and faced the Marauders and Black’s cousin. “Can we sit here?”

Lily sighed and found, as she looked up and down the table, that all the other benches were already full. The redhead nodded and began eating. Tonks, Lupin and Pettigrew sat on her side so that Lily was in between the girl and Lupin.

Potter and Black stood on the bench before vaulting to the other side where they sat across from Lily. Lily rolled her eyes at their arrogant, showing-off ways and ignored them.

A prefect walked by handing out time tables. She had Care of Magical Creatures first. It was her worst class. Its requirement for a love of furry animals made Lily slightly nauseous.

Lily had taken all the NEWT classes that she could so as to be prepared for any job she may someday get, if Voldemort permitted her, of course.

“Are you excited about class?” asked Lily to Tonks, who was rapidly changing her hair every color that she could think of.

“Oh, yes. I’m trying to find a color that will make a good impression on the teachers. You’re the best student, so maybe I should be you!” She quickly morphed back into Lily.

Lily watched Black do a double take and look at the two in confusion.

“Try to guess who’s Lily,” said Tonks in her disguise, voice as emotionless as she could make it.

While Black was still looking completely puzzled, Potter said, “That’s Evans,” and pointed straight at her.

With a pout, Tonks morphed back. “How did you know?” she asked wearily.

Potter shrugged, “The eyes.”

“I copied them perfect!” argued Tonks.

“No,” said Potter, waving his fork around to emphasize. “Not the color, or the shape. Hers are like... . Where your’s are all happy, hers stay blank.”

Tonks and Lily stared into each others eyes. Tonks’ now purple orbs were indeed bright. Lily could see the spunk in them. She knew exactly what Tonks was seeing; her eyes were exactly as Potter had said.

Lily watched Tonks’ eyes turn green as she focused on copying them exactly, but she was unable. “Don’t hurt yourself,” Lily muttered to Tonks, who looked as though she were about to explode. “Your eyes don’t show an emotion you’re pretending to have. If you smile, but are really mad, your eyes show it,” Lily explained softly.

“Then why are yours so blank?” asked Tonks curiously.

Lily was speechless. Never had she been around anyone who was quite able to read in between the lines of what she said as Tonks could. Lily knew only one way to change the subject. She opened the shutters on her eyes and let her emotions gleam. “I don’t know what

you're talking about," said Lily, meeting her eyes innocently. Tonks looked startled for a second, then looked away. Lily quickly cleared her eyes once more and turned to her food.

"Babe, what do you have first?" asked Black. Lily jerked up and met his gray eyes.

"Don't call me babe."

"All right, doll, what do you have first?"

"Care of Magical Creatures and 'doll' is just as bad as babe," Lily said uncomfortably. Had Black been possessed or something? His suddenly flirtatious attitude put her immediately on her guard, for she and Black had never quite seen eye to eye, like over the summer in the café.

"So do we," said Black.

Tonks sighed at his oh-so-intelligent reply. "Leave us in peace."

Lily snorted and murmured to Tonks, "The only way you'll be getting peace around the Marauders is if you rest in peace."

Tonks laughed. And laughed. And laughed. Lily didn't think it was that funny, but she instinctively felt the laughter bubble up inside her. She swallowed it with difficulty, for other peoples' merriment often caused smiles and laughter to spread around, and she could not afford that while sitting in the same room with Bellatrix Black and her gang.

Finally bringing them back to the original topic, Lily suggested, "Why not do your hair blond with purple streaks? That way the teachers won't be as shocked if you have aqua hair tomorrow, but it also isn't too wild."

Tonks nodded and morphed her hair into Lily's recommended style, along with matching eyes. "We'd better get going. Do you guys think you can walk me to the Transfiguration Wing?"

As Potter rose from the bench, he seemed unable to control the urge to ask once more, "Will you go to Hogsmeade with me?" Lily scowled and gave a sharp no before picking up her discarded book.

"Animagus?," asked Pettigrew with a scoff. "What, do you want to become one? It takes intelligence, passion, determination, hard work, power, motivation to become one of the amazing few... or at least that's what I read," he amended after a sharp nudge from Black.

"Are you thinking of becoming one?" asked Lupin in interest. "I think you could."

Lily shrugged. "Maybe someday," she lied softly, thoughts on the wolf form that lived under the surface of her Lily/ Lady Velisna exterior.

"Good luck, darling," said Potter suavely as he led the group away.

The moment Evans was out of earshot Sirius turned to James, "We're trying to become friends with her! 'Will you go to Hogsmeade with me' you said. I am floored by your friendliness! You didn't become friends with me by asking me out!"

Tonks interrupted gently, "Thank goodness for that."

After shooting her a glare, James confessed to Sirius, "I can't help it. She's just so beautif- mysterious."

"Exactly," said Sirius with a great show of rolling his eyes. "We're trying to solve the mystery, not be knocked senseless by it! Ah well Prongsie, at least Moony was nice to her, eh, Remus?"

"That's because I know how to be nice. You weren't exactly doing a very good job yourself, Paddy. She asked you not to flirt, but no, you had to just keep on doing it," said Remus.

"And did you see that? She wanted to become an Animagus," Peter said with a laugh. "Well, I mean," he said hurriedly, casting a glance at Tonks, who was looking at him curiously. "I doubt she has the power."

“Yeah,” agreed Sirius sarcastically. “She only had the highest OWL scores in our year. Every one was a bloody Outstanding.”

“You boys,” said Tonks irritably, “know absolutely nothing about becoming friends with girls.” She had been informed of their whole plan when they had walked her down for breakfast.

“Oh yeah?” challenged Sirius, “I’ve dated more girls than these three combined! I mean, what female can resist this face?” he asked, putting on his begging face, the one that had been perfected when he was the beloved Padfoot, roaming the streets of Hogsmeade.

His question was answered when Tonks slapped his arm and told him he looked like a kicked puppy. ‘Amazing,’ thought Sirius, ‘how accurate she is when she doesn’t know the half of it.’

“I said becoming friends with girls... not boyfriends. You have to be polite, and, I dunno, call her by her first name!” Tonks hissed.

“So we can call you Nymphadora?” asked James with a smile. “Or Nymphie?” He ducked the punch she threw him and grinned.

“Let’s get you to Transfiguration, and you can explain other girl-befriending tactics on the way,” Remus suggested and led them forward.

Hope you enjoyed! Please review. As I said for my other story, I took the time to type this, so you can take the time to type a two- word review.

Severus looked up at the staff table in shock. Dumbledore nodded solemnly and returned to his conversation with Professor McGonagall. Severus shooed away the brown school owl and looked over the note once more.

'Mr. Snape (it read),

Please meet me in my office after breakfast. It is behind the stone griffin on the third floor. The password is bananas. We need to talk.

Professor Albus Dumbledore.'

Severus racked his brains for any reasons that the Headmaster would want to see him. He could only think of two things: (a) Dumbledore had a strange habit of selecting students at random to have tea and crumpets, while becoming chummy with them (for that is what Severus thought had happened with the Marauders) or (b) the most powerful Light wizard had found out about his stay at Nightshade Mansion. He prayed to any gods listening that it was the first.

He gulped and looked down at his suddenly unappetizing breakfast. The Slytherin quickly glanced around to see if any of his fellow students had seen the note. Thankfully, he was seated next to two giggling first-years and George Goyle, who was busy playing Bloody Knuckles with Bo Crabbe.

'Dunces,' thought Severus scathingly. Distracting himself from his worries, he began to meditate, clearing his mind of all thought and emotions. His mind was the only thing that was his alone and it took dedication and hard work to keep it that way. It had scared him how easily Lily had broken into his mind and he hoped she would be the last to be able to do that.

After what seemed an eternity, he distantly heard the shuffle of footsteps that signified students leaving the Great Hall. The Slytherin rose, shouldered his backpack and walked out of the room amidst the flood of students early awaiting (or dreading) the first class of the year.

He walked quickly up the stairs, finding that he was more nervous in Hogwarts than in Nightshade Mansion. He was in Light territory now, out of his area of expertise. His feet led him to the imposing stone gargoyle much too soon. He cleared his throat. "Bananas," he said firmly. A loud grating sound resounded from the stone figure and it moved aside to reveal a winding staircase. Taking a claming breath, Severus began to climb the stairs. He felt a man headed to the gallows.

Severus knocked on the wooden door as loudly as he dared. "Mr. Snape, I presume? Come in," replied a weary voice from within.

The boy opened the door and slipped in, closing the door softly behind him. Dumbledore sat calmly at his desk, dark violet robes flowing down his arms. "Please take a seat, Mr. Snape."

Severus walked forward and sat warily in the plush red armchair across from his Headmaster. "Would you like a peppermint?" inquired the old man calmly, voice betraying nothing of what he was feeling.

Severus answered softly, "No, sir."

"Well then, I'll get straight to the point. I hate to do this, but will you please roll up your left sleeve?"

Severus froze. He met the Headmaster's piercing blue eyes and noted in hopelessness that his Occlumency was no match for the power behind those azure pools.

"Now, Mr. Snape." Dumbledore's tone was mild, but his eyes were as frozen as the iceberg that spelled the doom for the Titanic.

Severus slowly began rolling up his sleeve, inch by inch, until he reached his elbow. When he did nothing else, Dumbeldore sadi calmly, "Show me your forearm."

The trapped Slytherin rolled out his arm and showed the Headmaster the black Dark Mark. The ghastly skull and snake that were burned in his pale skin looked out of place in the tranquil surroundings of the Headmaster's office.

The old wizard sighed. "Why?"

That one word of sadness caused Severus's shields to collapse. The reality of the pit he was in was clear. He was forced to be a Death Eater and now he would be forced into Azkaban for the cause he was so unfaithful to.

'Like I had a choice,' thought Severus. The true answer to Dumbledore's question was so simple, yet so unbelievable.

Instead of answering the unanswerable question, Severus simply gave a sigh. "Before I am sent to Azkaban, can I please say goodbye to some friends?" He had to see Lily again. She was his only friend, and he was hers, and now he was deserting her.

"I did not bring you here to send you to jail. I called you here to find the truth. Why?" he asked again, this time with an intense gaze.

The power behind those eyes caused Severus to utter the one true answer he had for the question. "Because I had to."

"Because you had to," repeated Dumbledore. "Because you had to what? Find happiness in destroying a race? To give yourself power? To prove loyalty to your master?" This was not sarcastic anger. This was true curiosity.

"The choice was Death Eater or die," Severus said calmly, knowing his freedom was at an end no matter what he said. Might as well go down truthfully. "Unlike you 'brave' Gryffindors, I chose life." The irony of that statement hit him as his thoughts drifted again to Lily.

"Who was it that took you before Voldemort?" Severus flinched at both the question and the name.

Severus did not speak, looking anywhere but at the wizard before him. 'My bloody father,' he answered mentally.

Dumbledore sighed at the silence and said, "I had hoped you would answer my questions willingly. Legilimens!"

Severus instantly threw up all his guards, but each resistance was swept as though by the ocean flooding through. Instead of the normal rush of memories, only a certain scene appeared. Severus watched his father inform him that it was time to meet his master. A slap resounded through the room as his father struck him for his silence. "I'm delighted, Father," Severus had said, not even flinching from the blow.

"I will get my answers," Dumbledore stated mildly, setting down his wand again. "Do you know any Death Eaters at this school?"

Answering truthfully, yet voiding the truth, Severus said, "I do not know for certain of any Death Eaters here." Severus had never actually seen the Dark Mark on his Slytherin classmates and Lily wasn't technically a Death Eater.

"May I ask one question, sir?" asked Severus cautiously.

The Headmaster seemed taken aback from a split second before nodding. "Of course, Mr. Snape."

"How did you know?"

Dumbledore did not have to ask what he meant. "You don't know, do you?" he asked softly, not expecting a reply.

"Mr. Snape, earlier this morning, Tantakah Snape was arrested for being a Death Eater and several uses of Unforgivable curses. At his trial, he was given a choice: to either give us Death Eater names, or have the Kiss administered immediately. The only name he was able to get out before a masked Death Eater killed him was yours."

Severus blinked. His father was dead. Severus was shocked to find that he held only one drop of grief, and that was because he had wished to kill his father himself.

"Why don't we make a deal? You be my spy, my way to Voldemort, and I tell no one what you are. As head of Wizengamot, I was the only person present at the time of the revelation. Do we have a deal?"

Severus looked into those piercing blue eyes and saw his only path to freedom. "Deal," he said, clasping Dumbledore's hand firmly.

Now, remember, I wrote this before HBP, so in this story, Severus was turned Light in 7th year. Please review! (You know, I wrote long chapter, I need long reviews...)

“And this book will be helpful in first year Transfiguration,” completed Lily, placing another thick book on the stack next to where Tonks sat, already immersed in Needle Into a Haystack.

“Thanks, Lils,” she muttered distractedly, not glancing up from her page.

Lily sighed at the nickname, sat down on the bench next to her and considered telling her off. Eventually she decided against it, unnaturally glad at the affectionate shortening of her name. It was better Velisna.

Suddenly, the library door burst open and a quartet of boys strode into the library.

“See, it was right,” Black said to Potter, tucking a crisp parchment into his robe pocket.

“Hey beautiful,” Black said, pushing Tonks sideways on the bench and sitting next to Lily, then greeting the Metamorphmagus, “Hey Nymphiepoo.”

Tonks scowled and swatted Black on the head.

“What are you doing here?” hissed Lily, removing the arm Black had slung over her shoulder.

“Looking for you, of course!” exclaimed the handsome boy, not at all disheartened by her iciness, simply re-draping his arm on her unwilling shoulder.

“Why?” asked Lily, deciding to ignore the offending appendage.

“Because that’s what friends do,” said Potter softly, with an intense spark in his hazel eyes.

“I don’t need friends,” said Lily just as quietly.

“Oh yeah?” asked Tonks, hurt evident in her eyes. “Why not?”

Softening slightly, Lily said, "Who would need more friends when I already have you?"

"C'mon, Lily," said Black, suddenly serious. "What are you afraid of?"

Though his tone was light-hearted, his silver eyes were full of curiosity and suspicion.

What should she say? Should she confess how great her fear was that one day she would be forced to Stun someone she knew, someone she cared for? Could she ever make them understand how hard it was to be her, to be trusted by the Dark Lord who could turn on her at any moment? Could she trust them with the fact that she was a Death Eater? 'Not a chance,' she thought sadly.

Realizing she had been silent for over a minute and they were all looking at her curiously, she said, "I'm afraid of being seen in public with the likes of you," said Lily coldly.

"Your father wouldn't like that, would he?" asked Black softly. To Lily, it seemed that the two of them were the only people in the room, locked in a battle of persuasion, suspicion and desperation.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Lily dismissively, letting only the lightest bit of emotion creep into her voice to add to the effect.

"I think you do," said Black. "Diagon Alley. Ring any bells?" At Lily's silence, he continued, "Let me refresh your memory. Pensivia," he muttered, standing with his wand placed at his own temple.

Seeing Lily's confused look, Lupin supplied, "It's a primitive form of the Pensieve. It lets you see events through a person's eyes. Of course, it isn't as effective as a Pensieve for your sight and hearing is limited to what the person saw and heard." Lily glanced at him quickly, half expecting to see him consulting a textbook, but he was simply staring at the projection that had appeared on the white library wall, one of the only bookshelf-free places in the room. It began halfway through the tension-filled conversation the two of them had been having at Gillyweed Stew.

“Are you going to make me?” asked the Lily on the screen.

“If I have to, yes,” said a disembodied voice that echoed. A wand appeared, pointing at the Lily, but soon there was another wand pointed straight at the screen, blocking some of the view.

“Is that a fact?” asked the Lily on the screen. “I’d like to see you try. You have no clue who you’re dealing with.” The screen went black for a split second as Black blinked.

Suddenly two more disembodied voices said, “What’s going on here?” The wand so close to Black’s eye jerked sideways as the hand that held it twitched. The wand was set down and Black watched Lily turn to face Potter and a tall man in dark blue robes and sunglasses.

“Time to leave,” said who Lily knew to be Voldemort. The man whirled around and went to the door. Sirius looked back in time to see Lily cast a sad glance at the glass of tea, pick up her bags and leave.

“What was that all about?” asked Potter as he sat down the Butterbeers in his hands on the table.

“I dunno,” said Black’s voice. “But I’m going to find out. Stay here.” The screen rose and began bobbing after the dark robed man and Lily.

A spell for keen hearing was placed on Sirius and he neared the two people walking. Voldemort was saying, “... ack and a Potter you were sitting with?”

Lily’s whisper was picked up, barely audible in the other amplified sounds. “They... down without in... tion. I tried to get them to leave, but-“

“Are either-” said the man before a sudden rush of hooting and flapping took over Black’s hearing and he took off the spell with one final glance at the couple before turning back to the café.

The screen disappeared as Black took the wand away from his temple. "Shame I lost sound at the last part," said Black lightly. "I'm sure your conversation would have proved most interesting."

Lily stood up abruptly. "You can't expect me to just sit here and listen to you make false accusations against me and my adoptive father," she hissed. "You're making a mountain out of a molehill."

She strode out in the silence that followed.

"What's a molehill?" asked Tonks in confusion, following Lily.

Lily sped up to evade the Metamorphmagus, who continued after her, calling her name in worry.

The second Lily rounded a corner she erupted into a sprint, habitually staying in any shadow she could find. After slipping past two openly snogging Hufflepuffs and a group of chatting Ravenclaws, she was finally outside.

The redhead ran to a grassy ledge over the lake and sat down with a quiet thump. She slowly picked the specks of dead grass and dirt from her ebony robes, trying to clear her worried mind. She kept her face perfectly relaxed, unwilling to show the world the chaos that was her thoughts. Though it had its perks, being the adoptive daughter of the Dark Lord was no way to live.

Severus laid on the top of one of tables, absent mindedly shooting flies of the ancient ceiling. Once the bell that signified the beginning of lunch had rung, Severus walked quietly out of the empty classroom. He had slowly begun to realize that making the deal with Dumbledore was the most dangerous thing he had ever done.

He walked lazily up the dungeon stairs, which were spotless due to the house-elves vigorous cleaning (other than a hot pink splash on the stone from where a bumbling Hufflepuff had spilled an incorrectly brewed potion.)

When he reached the first floor, the Slytherin caught sight of the Gryffindor girl he had seen Lily with the night before. Her previously vibrant hair was black with worry.

“Lily!” she called, looking around. “He didn’t mean it! Where is she?” the first-year muttered, just loudly enough for Severus to hear it.

Immediately, thoughts began racing through Severus’ head. He racked his brain to see if he knew where she was. She liked quiet places, preferably outdoors... the lake!

Changing course mid-stride, Severus headed towards the giant oak wood doors that lead the way to the magnificent Hogwarts’ grounds.

He walked out and saw a black and red smudge against the calm turquoise lake that was broken only by the long gray tentacles of the peaceful Giant Squid. Walking over quietly, Severus sat down silently beside her. By her blank face, Severus could see that she was deep in meditation.

“Lily?” he said softly. With a jolt, she opened her vibrant emerald eyes and looked over at him.

When she saw who it was, she visibly relaxed and said, “Hello Severus.” Her voice was even softer than usual, full of undisguised weariness.

“What happened?” he asked, a sudden surge of protectiveness rushing over him.

She was silent. For a minute, Severus thought she wasn’t going to answer until she finally muttered, “Black.”

Hiding his fury, Severus hissed, “What did he do?” He flinched as he heard his own voice, harshly waspish in his anger.

She quickly explained all that had just passed, voice growing steadily faster and faster until Severus felt he was being swept away by the torrent of information.

“... and he’ll find out and I’ll be arrested and Voldemort will be captured and we’ll both die!” she finished, taking a deep breath afterwards, completely out of breath.

Severus didn’t know what to say. This outburst was extremely out of character for the Lily he knew; the Lady Velisna he knew. “Lily,” he said soothingly. She seemed not to hear him in her panic. She was even paler than normal and her small hands were shaking.

The Gryffindor leapt to her feet and began striding towards the Forbidden Forest, muttering things such as, “...they’ll never find me,” and, “... danger to him...”

Severus, after recovering from the shock, also rose to his feet and raced after her. He caught up quickly, the distraught Lily not even hearing his jarring footsteps as he sprinted across the brown grass, crunching gold leaves as they neared the forest.

He got in between her and the forest before whirling around to face her, obsidian eyes meeting emerald. The girl raised her eyebrows in surprise, as though she had forgotten he was near.

“I won’t let you run away from your problems,” he said, rougher than he had meant to.

“Exactly how,” she murmured with a voice cool and collected once more, “do you plan to stop me?”

“Physical force, if necessary,” Severus growled, suddenly greatly aware of the height difference between them.

She gave no reaction other than the shock in her determined green eyes. It suddenly occurred to Severus that, however petite, Lily was one of the strongest people he had ever met and realized how foolish his threat sounded.

Formulating a plan, he quickly whipped out his wand and aimed it at Lily. She watched his eyes carefully, but he knew in her weakened state that she would not be able to see his thoughts. “Accio wand,” he

thought triumphantly and watched as Lily's wand flew out of her sleeve and straight into Severus' hand. Lily stared at him, baffled.

"Now Lily, listen to me," Severus said soothingly, taking a step towards her. Instead of backing away, Lily tried to go past him to the forest, still intent on escape.

Severus stepped directly in front of her and said sternly, "That's not listening." The redhead glowered at him, emerald eyes filled with such a range of emotions that Severus couldn't even name them all. For nearly a minute they stood like that, Severus gazing into the eyes he was so used to seeing blank, and trying to absorb her wild emotions while Lily seemed to also be trying to sort through her feelings.

Then, she blinked and shook her head, causing one lock of auburn hair to slip out of her ponytail into her pale face. "Let me by, " Lily whispered. Her soft command seemed to echo, a lone sound in the empty, windswept grounds.

"No," said Severus simply.

Her gaze intensified and Severus found himself gasping for air as an invisible force tightened around his neck. He clutched at his throat, panic filling his head. "Li-ly..." he croaked pleadingly, meeting her determined eyes.

At once, the pressure was gone, and Severus fell, gasping, on all fours. Glancing up, he saw Lily staring at her hands as though they had been physically around his neck. "I suppose I'm more like him than I thought."

"But... you're not," gasped Severus.

"What?" the girl whispered sharply.

"You... stopped," he croaked before letting out a series of empty, wracking coughs. "you stopped."

Lily's eyes suddenly cleared and she stared apologetically at the weak figure before her, the boy that her barrier between her and madness. "Come. I'd better get you back up to the castle."

Dudes.... Massive chapter quickly updated need at least 10 really long reviews to update again!

Chapter 13: Staircases and Gossip

This chapter is dedicated to DEBBIE! Thank you SO MUCH for typing this (and the next four) chapters for me! My reviewers need to thank you for this quick updates.

“I want to apologize,” said a quiet voice in front of her. Lily met Black’s observant gray eyes coldly from across the table.

“Do you?” She asked before returning her gaze back to the book that was held tightly in her pale hands. It was Sunday morning and Lily had gotten little sleep the night before.

“Yes,” he said firmly, obviously itching to reach and grab the novel from her hands.

Lily looked up long enough to convey boredom, then returning her attention to the black and white words that weaved the magical tale of Fire Unicorn.

“Come on, Lily,” said Tonks in desperation. She stood with the Marauders behind Black, showing Lily where her true loyalties laid.

Lily calmly took another bite of the barely touched plate of eggs and ham before her and continued reading.

“Leave her alone,” said a voice Lily thought she’d never hear sticking up for her – Potter.

Lily looked up and opened her mouth but was cut off by a voice from behind her. “Are they bothering you?” asked the cold voice of Bellatrix Black.

The Gryffindor turned slowly to face the group behind her. There stood Bellatrix, her sister Narcissa, Rudolphus LeStrange, Regulus Black, George Goyle, and Jerry Crabbe.

Lily didn’t answer; instead, she stared into the dark eyes of Bellatrix.

Narcissa, whom Lily had met only in the company of her fiancé, Lucius Malfoy, spoke up, was obviously the one who dared to take Bellatrix's place of attention. "Come to the Sytherin table. We accidentally intercepted a letter for you from Marvolo Smith."

Narcissa's pale blue eyes gazed into Lily, knowing full well that Lily understood whom she was talking about.

"Ah, yes. Let's go," Lily said calmly, rising from her bench.

"Wait!" Black growled. Lily looked over and saw him scowling darkly at Bellatrix, Regulus, and Narcissa, eyes flicking back and forth quickly. "You can't trust them."

"And I can trust you?" asked Lily softly, before turning to Bellatrix and Narcissa, who stood next to each other. Unless you had prior knowledge, it would be impossible to tell that the fair, blonde Narcissa could be sisters with the dark Bellatrix.

Suddenly, a voice halted her. "Yes, you can."

Lily turned and stared incredulously in Tonks' eyes, which were pale gold that day.

"Ah, you're Andromeda's girl, aren't you?" said Narcissa. "Nymphadora, wasn't it? Such a disappointment..." Fire seemed to be shooting from Tonks' golden eyes and she looked ready to vault over the table and murder her young aunt.

"Just because my other didn't marry some blood-obsessed murdering young lunatic like your bloody Lord Voldemort doesn't mean--"

Narcissa interrupted with a false confused smile. "My dear niece, I didn't mean your mother was the disappointment." She met Tonks' furious eyes long enough to get her point across before turning to her sister and Lily, who was keeping her face purposely blank.

"Let's go already," Lily hissed, meeting Bellatrix' eyes. It gave Lily no small amount of satisfaction to see the head Death Eater at Hogwarts shrink before her.

Bellatrix turned on her heel and strode to the green and silver clad table with the other Sytherin cronies trailing behind. Lily waited a few seconds before following, just to show Bellatrix she did not have to take orders from a lower-class Death Eater.

Sitting haughtily on the table was Voldemort's owl, ruffling his brown feathers in annoyance. Kendavra was deceptively plain in appearance. No one would guess he was Death's messenger.

Tied to his plain legs was a tightly scrolled letter. Lily could tell that the Death Eater, for all their tough facades, had not dared to open it. Lily sat down on the bench calmly and untied the letter.

Within the scroll, there were two slips of parchment. One was entitled 'Bellatrix Black,' and the other was addressed to 'Lady Velisna.' "For you," said Lily dully, handing one of the papers to the suddenly excited Bellatrix.

As Bellatrix tore off the seal of her letter, Lily took her time slowly separating the black wax from the pale parchment and unfolding the letter inside.

'Lady Velisna,' it read,

'I hope this finds you healthy and well. It has come to my attention that you have befriended a first-year half-blood and the group of blood-traitors we had a discussion about in Diagon Alley. If such reports continue to come to my attention, I will be forced to take you from the school and its Light temptations. If you try to run away, remember that I still know where your sister lives. I hope to see you again soon, my daughter.'

Lily felt light goosebumps break through her arms as the sharp memories of Voldemort's lightning temper came back. Swiftly, Lily pulled out her wand and incinerated the parchment with a hot blue flame. Leaning close to the intelligent owl, Lily murmured, "Fly to my dorm. I'll send a reply from there."

As the pale brown owl hooted and swooped away, Lily suddenly felt all appetite leave her. Lily went back to the Gryffindor table with her face blank and her steps proud, but she could not have been more frightened. She swiftly dumped Fire Unicorn in her backpack and shouldered the bag. Without a backward glance to the watchful Sytherins, the girl strolled out of the great hall.

Faintly, Lily heard a strange hissing sound. She had heard it at first as Narcissa stood taunting Tonks, but had thought it was her imagination. She looked around sharply for the source of the sound, but it seemed to follow, almost on top of her.

She looked to the floor, but the travel of her eyes rested on the emerald snake that was coiled on the back of her hand. Fangs bared, the snake was slithering halfway up and continuously looked back in the direction of the Great Hall and hissed.

Lily sighed and felt a wave of tiredness hit her. Obviously feeling her exhaustion, the tattoo fell back, curled into a tight coil, and fell asleep. With a small frustrated groan, Lily jerked her black sleeve over her pale hand and walked faster. It was going to be a long day.

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James glared at the Sytherins as they watched Evans exit the Hall. "What's their problem?" asked the boy fiercely.

Sirius, who stood watching Lily exit, said thoughtfully, "Y'know, I think they know something we don't."

"About Evans?" questioned James sharply, turning to stare at Sirius.

"Either Lily or that 'Marvolo Smith' character. He has something to do with this. I've never seen anyone, not even a senior Death Eater, able to scare Regulus, but he had him groveling."

"I'm going to find her," said James, turning on his heel.

Sirius' calm voice stopped him in his tracks. "You really love her, don't you?"

“Yes,” replied James, before rushing out of the Great Hall after the troubled redhead.

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After several minutes of futile searching, James reached into his pocket with a frustrated cry. Quickly unfolding the large parchment, James tapped it with his wand and growled, “I solemnly swear I am up to no good.”

As black ink flourished across the parchment, James scanned it for the dot titled ‘Lily Evans.’

There! She was on the third floor, quickly heading to a flight of stairs. With a lurch, James jumped towards a portrait that concealed a staircase that would lead him straight to Lily’s corridor.

The staircase was dimly lit and covered in cobwebs and damp mold, but James paid them no mind. Taking the stairs three at a time, he tore up the secret passageway, determined to get to Lily before she reached the moving staircase.

He stumbled out from behind a small portrait hole to find himself staring at her retreating back. “Evans!” he called loudly.

As though she had been waiting for a sound like that, the girl broke into a sprint towards the looming staircase. James raced after her, Chaser speed kicking in.

However, he could not match the speed of the petite girl before him and she reached the staircase five steps before he. Then, as the Marauder knew it would, the passenger activated stairs began to move upwards, quickly leaving James behind.

Without pausing to think, the Gryffindor leapt for the stairs and caught it with his hands alone, the rest of his body dangling in the air. Evans, who had been standing at the top of the stair as though encouraging it move quicker, turned and saw James dangling from the bottom stair,

hands futilely trying to get a firm grip on the pale marble that rose smoothly with the stairs.

Her green eyes widened, looking like emeralds on a clear pond surface. "Potter?" she gasped.

He gave a weak smile that quickly disappeared as his fingers slipped even further. "A little help?" he asked, but was suddenly uncertain that she would save him.

For a moment, she did look indecisive, but descended on the stairs quickly. James felt his fingers continuing to slip further and further.

Just as she reached the second to last step, a sudden jolt in the stairs caused her to fall to the left, and James' right hand to lose its grip on the stairs entirely.

He felt her body swinging to and fro dangerously. "Hold on, Potter!" came a quiet voice in his ear. He looked up and saw Evans crouching on the second to last step. She reached for his right hand. He reached up with it and grasped hers tightly. The redhead placed her left hand over it and pulled back. To his surprise, James saw a strange symbol on her left hand. Seeing his gaze, she pulled the hand back as though it was on fire, but quickly realized her mistake as James slipped from her grasp.

For a moment he was falling, but he felt his hands gripped in a cold, firm hold and met the face of Lily Evans. She was lying over the last three steps and obviously digging into them with her feet to keep her on as the stairs continued to rise.

"How is this going to work?" asked James.

Annoyance flashed in her suddenly full emerald eyes, but she said calmly, "How about we solve that when we stop?"

James nodded, but felt his fear grow. Suddenly, there was a giant jolt as the stairs hit the next hall and the girl slipped from the last thing holding her to the ground.

James watched her as they fell together. At first, she opened her mouth as though she was trying to scream, but then, as though accepting death, she closed her eyes and a smile so faint it was hardly visible appeared on her dark lips.

James did nothing but watch his love fall as his equal momentum carried him down to the hard stone with her. Then, just as they neared the ground, James felt himself hit something soft and cushy.

Opening his eyes, he saw that he was suspended over the ground in some sort of invisible net. He could hear Evans curse softly under her breath, but when he looked over to her, she was totally emotionless.

Activated by the presence of caught students, the invisible cushion lowered them slowly to the ground, and then dumped them out on the floor.

James grunted as Evans fell on top of him. She was breathing heavily, and once she realized their faces were only centimeters apart, her breath increased. However, instead of seeing gloomy void in her eyes, or even lust as he knew gleamed in his own, he saw orbs of fear. James gulped and looked down at the red lips so close to his face. Before he could make up his mind on his next action, a happy voice exclaimed, "Just wait until I publish this!" and there was a bright flash of light that James registered to be a camera.

Lily was on her feet before James could respond to the voice. "Jorkins," she hissed.

Bertha Jorkins was the editor, cofounder along with Rita Skeeter, and main writer of the school newspaper, 'Hogwarts, Not Hogwash.' James sat up and saw the brunette straighten her sunglasses with a well-manicured hand. Though she wore the bland school uniform robes, she had spiced them up by adding hot pink stars all over her pointed hat and making sure her overly long nails were the same shade.

"So, Lily darling, how long have you and James been together? Are you keeping it a secret? Oh, his will easily be the best selling edition yet!"

James rose slowly, watching Evans as she twirled her wand between her fingers. He had seen the redhead mad often enough to know that she was in her danger stance. Jorkins, being the Hufflepuff fifth-year that she was, obviously was not as accustomed to watching the different moods of Evans to know when to duck as the Gryffindors were.

“Who knows?” continued Jorkins, unaware of the active volcano in front of her. “I may even get some Sytherins to buy this time.”

Explosion time. James inched forward, warily watching Evans get a firmer grip on her wand. Sure, James had cursed Bertha plenty of times for bugging him, the most prominent in his memory being hexing her for lying about finding him snogging Jessica Storeson behind the greenhouses. However, he was uncertain that Evans would stop at petty curses like an Engorgement Charm.

“Stupefy!” cried James. There was a giant flash of red light and both Evans and Jorkins fell to the ground. Evans’ wand was still smoking from her own Stunning Spell. Deciding to wake Bertha first, James went over to her and murmured, “Ennervate.” She didn’t move. With a jolt of panic, James checked her pulse, but found she was only stunned. He tried to wake her again, but the spell failed a second time.

Worried that he had forgotten the correct incantation, he went over to where Evans laid, facedown and red hair flowing out onto the stone with a snapped ponytail holder beside her.

“Ennerverate.”

There was a hardly audible groan as she rolled onto her back and opened her startling emerald eyes. Relief filled him, and he returned to Jorkins, repeating the spell. Still no answer. “What did you do?” he asked the dazed girl.

Evans shook her head to clear it and whispered, “I Stunned her.”

“Then why isn’t my spell working?” asked James in exasperation.

“...can only be reversed by an equally powerful Ennervate...” she mumbled softly.

“Huh?”

Evans ignored him and walked to where Jorkins lay. She opened her mouth, but instead of reviving her, she said, “Obilviate.”

James gasped at her. “That spell’s illegal in school!”

She scowled at him and murmured, “Ennervate.” Immediately her eyes opened and Jorkins rose unsteadily.

“What ‘append?” she slurred.

James watched the redhead eye her coldly. “You fell down the stairs,” she said, pointing over at a staircase nearby.

“Really? The last thing I remember was...eating.”

“Eating,” repeated Lily dryly. “What was the date?”

“November 2nd.” Two weeks ago.

“Here, you need to go to the Hospital Wing,” said James. “That was quite a fall you had, Jorkins.” He gave Lily a wink and put Jorkins’ arm on his shoulder and began to help her away.

Instead of leading her up the stairs, James opened a tapestry and told her to walk straight up. After seeing her give a dazed nod, James closed the portrait behind her and turned to Evans.

“You know,” he said, walking closer to her, “there was a reason for me jumping onto a moving staircase after you.” He gazed into her beautiful green eyes. “I wanted to know who Marvolo Smith is.”

No matter how he had looked, James could detect no reaction, positive or negative, in those eyes. “My father. Adoptive,” she clarified.

“Is he a wizard?”

“Didn’t you guys just apologize this morning for accusing him?” se retorted quietly. Then she said softer, “Yeah, he is.”

“A Sytherin?”

“What does it matter? Just leave me alone!” she hissed, turning on her heel and striding away.

“Is he a Death Eater?” he called to her retreating back, but there was no pause in her quick stride and no reply on her dark lips.

Chapter 14: Hypothetically

This one is shorter because it is how the chapter runs. Enjoy!

“Now, where are the Death Eater headquarters?” asked Dumbledore as soon as Severus had settled down. He was in the Headmaster’s private meeting room, sitting warily on the edge of his armchair, still half believing that Dumbledore was going to call in an Auror Squad to arrest him at any time.

Severus opened his mouth to respond, but found he was unable to voice the answer. “I can’t say,” Severus stated in confusion.

“I thought he’d have a Secret Keeper. He’s probably his own, seeing as how he trusts no one,” replied Dumbledore with a sigh, though he apparently did not have his hopes up.

For a minute he lapsed into a thoughtful silence. Severus looked around the Headmaster’s meeting room to cover his unease. The walls were empty of any portrait so as to eliminate gossip and prying eyes.

The two chairs they were seated in were next to a roaring fire inside a tall, lavishly decorated gold and stone fireplace. On a tall gold perch next to the silver-bearded Headmaster was a swan-sized bird with stunning scarlet and gold feathers that glowed dimly in the light of the fire.

When Dumbledore spoke again, his voice was as calm as his surroundings. “Now, I know I’ve asked you before, but I must know. Do you have any suspicions about any of your peers as to whether or not they support Voldemort?”

Severus did not answer for a few minutes. Who should he betray? If he told on one, they might tell on another until someone, most likely Bellatrix Black, gave Lily away. No. No, they would never give away one so close to their master.

Severus sighed. “I have reason to suspect the Black sister, Regulus Black, George Goyle, Jerry Crabbe, and Rudolphus Lestranger. There

are several others who voice support, but are very unlikely to ever actually join him. Whether from fear or lack of devotion, I am not certain.”

Dumbledore nodded and said, “Well, as you probably know, I cannot take your evidence to Wizangamot, but I can keep n eye on those people. You will not be betrayed by me,” he said, obviously catching the light shimmer of fear in Severus’ eyes.

Snape took a deep breath. “Professor,” he began, meeting Dumbledore’s china blue eyes. “Let’s say I have this friend, hypothetically of course, and say this friend was working for Voldemort against h-his will. How would he get out? Hypothetically. Just wondering.”

Dumbledore answered, but Severus could not tell whether or not he believed his weak excuse. “A person who works for Voldemort cannot quit. Or at least, quit with his permission. They’d have to come to me or another of the Order for a plan of protection. Hypothetically. They’d have to be with you, so you could vouch for their loyalty.”

“Interesting,” said Severus, looking down at his black hat that was clutched tightly in his pale hands.

“Of course, it also may be affected by how many crimes they have committed, and how dangerous they are considered. If they don’t believe we can protect them... well, better to die good than live bad.”

“What if their relatives are being threatened?” asked Severus. “Hypo--”

“Yes, I know. Hypothetically, we would move the relative to a safe house first.”

“What if I know they want to leave Voldemort, but they wouldn’t think that you’re able to protect he-him and his family? And they are considered dangerous and would probably strike out at you in fear of Vol-Voldemort. Hypothetically, what then?”

“We could take and help them without their permission. All you have to do is set a date and bring them here.”

“Hypothetically,” added Severus quickly.

“Hypothetically,” agreed Dumbledore softly.

Chapter 16: Forbidden Forest Part I

The halls were awash with the smells of pine trees, popcorn, and suppressed excitement. Christmas was coming. Snape looked up as Lily brushed by him in the entrance hall to the feast. Without a word, she slipped a piece of parchment in his hand. Then she was gone, disappearing in the sea of students.

Severus took a seat at the end of the Slytherin table, just in time to watch the gold plates fill with food. There were plates of steaming mashed potatoes and simmering gravy, there were piles of breaded and grilled chicken tenders and legs, roast beef, steak, and several varieties of tender fish. Vegetables ranging from broccoli to roasted peppers decorated the edges of every platter. Cold, orange pumpkin juice filled large gold pitchers that were arranged with one every eight seats.

After filling his gold plate with rice and grilled chicken tenderloin, he unfolded Lily's note and read it while shoveling food into his mouth.

'Ready for those DA lessons we discussed on the train? Meet me by the edge of the FF at MN for your first lesson. Bring your W and a few cushions. – LV'

Severus looked across the Hall and saw Lily sitting alone, as usual. Though in the same position himself, he couldn't help feeling a pang of pity. As a Slytherin, Severus was like the rest of his house in valuing his own life over that of others. But he knew at that moment that if it ever came down between his own life and Lily's, he would die for her. So that's when he made his decision – he would take her to Dumbledore and his Order, whether she wanted to or not.

He'd talk to her at the lesson tonight, he swore to himself. Just to see if she'd agree.

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Lily sat with her back against a tree that overlooked the calm, dark lake. The light of the full moon was reflected on the still water, broken only by the random splash made by the tentacles of the giant squid.

She exhaled slowly, watching the light mist appear before her eyes, only to fade away again in the cool, crisp air.

Lily was also cold, but she delighted in feeling the sensation against her pale skin. Heat was the fuel for emotion: hot, passionate fury or fiery embarrassment or love. No, Lily was cold—emotionless. She couldn't afford heat. So, she relaxed in the chill as midnight and a night of work neared with a boom of Hogwarts' main clock to accent the hours as they swept by.

But no matter how cold her exterior was, her soul was on fire. Burning determination and unquenchable spirit lingered behind her mint eyes, ever thawing away at her mask.

She was no one's pawn, good or evil. No matter how desperate her situation got, she would not turn to the Light side for assistance. She was her own master, she was just...imprisoned by Voldemort at the moment. She'd escape. Eventually.

Lily suddenly sensed a presence beside her. There stood Severus, watching her through inscrutable eyes. "How long have you been standing there?" she whispered.

"A minute or so. Thinking about Him?" he asked, looking over at the lake.

"More like escape from Him," she replied, as still as the calm waters before her.

"Have you ever thought of...of asking Dumbledore for help?" Lily looked up at him, startled. He was still gazing away, black eyes distant and contained.

"Yes," replied Lily, "and there's absolutely no way I will. Not only is there too much at risk, but I'm going to solve this by myself." She sighed. "But enough of that, though. Are you ready? Did you bring the cushions?"

Severus tore his gaze away from the lake and nodded. "I had to filch them from the Common Room, but they're here."

"Good. Now put away your wand. This lesson will be wandless," she said, jumping nimbly to her feet.

"Wandless," he repeated as she arranged the cushions on the rocky ground, staining the silver pillows brown with the dark dirt. "I thought you said that I should bring my wand. Isn't that what the 'W' stood for?"

"Did you happen to notice what forest we're next to?" Lily asked softly as she lined the cushions up in a two-by-six block.

"The Forbi—oh."

"Exactly. I didn't want us to be caught without protection by whatever's in there." She stepped back and looked at the pillows. "Now, what should we start with? Throwing things? Ripping, burning, boiling, freezing, changing--"

"Let's try freezing first," said Severus. Lily nodded and thrust her hand towards the lake.

Suddenly, tendrils of ice began to creep across the still waters. As the ice went further out in the lake, the frozen water was solid white, indicating the exceptionally thick ice that appeared from the sheer power of Lily Evans.

Lily felt her energy waning, so she halted the ice's progress and leaned against a tree. "Now," she took another breath, "you try. Focus on something cold, like a memory or feeling."

Severus closed his eyes. "Now imagine the ice running through your veins, but don't let it freeze you!" she growled as Severus began shivering. "Many wizards have died trying to create ice, for it might form in their veins instead of outside the body. Now, focus on the chill and let it fly through your fingers."

The Slytherin flung out his arm sharply, but no ice left. "Cold," he hissed, pulling his hand close to him.

"Think of warmth! This is all controlled by your mind. Think of sunlight, or daisies or something!" Lily was getting panicky, seeing an icy paleness wrap around Severus' fingers. "Warm! Summer! Something fiery...your hate for Potter and Black! Think of how much you loathe them and let it run through your hand." For a second, Lily wasn't sure that Severus heard her, but then she saw the blue rapidly retreating from his fingers, replaced with a healthy pink glow.

"Good, Severus. Now, sit down and rest for a second." The black-haired boy fell to the ground. Airily caught by the pillows Lily had laid there just for that purpose. It was several minutes before he opened his eyes again.

"What happened?" he asked.

"You couldn't get the ice out. No worries, it happens to most of the wizards who try it for their first time."

"Did you?" asked Severus, meeting her frozen green eyes. She shook her head and looked back to the lake. She shouldn't have given him this option. Lily knew that the Dark Arts were deadly, and she shouldn't have put her friend in such a situation.

"Lily! We're not safe out here!" said Severus, suddenly up and standing beside her.

"I know that the Arts can be startling the first time you try them, but you've got-"

"No, Lily, not that." Severus pointed at the reflection of the full moon on the lake. "That."

Then, as if on cue, there was a blood-curdling howl, a startled bark, and the sounds of distant hoof beats.

"Werewolf," breathed Lily.

Please review! Reviews just make my day. Whether you hate it, love it, or just want to make a comment about grammar or plot, please tell me. Oh, yes, and the next chapter is dedicated to the first person to correctly translate the letter.

Chapter 17: Forbidden Forest Part II

Severus watched the werewolf, whom he knew to be Lupin, stand there, unsure what to do now that he'd actually broken out from below the Whomping Willow. Then, it jerked its head in his and Lily's direction and sniffed the air. It howled and began running towards the two people. 'What can I do? What can I do? What can I-'

"Severus! Forest or castle?" Lily said, grabbing his arm and making him face her. Severus couldn't think. He knew he was going to be eaten by a werewolf and mauled and killed and— "Forest it is," whispered Lily, grabbing his arm and running into the row of brambles that lined the forest. "C'mon Severus! Remember the Obstacle Room? This is it, so just hurry!"

Severus knew, at that statement, that Lily wasn't going to leave him. She could easily dart away, leaving him as a midnight snack for a bloodthirsty Marauder, but she wouldn't. The redhead continued pulling him through the trees, ignoring the branches that slapped her in the face. Severus was unharmed by the brushwood that she had already pushed out of the way, but he knew that the many red stripes on her arms weren't the reflection of her hair. From behind came the sound of paws slapping the forest floor, followed by worried barking and swift hoof beats.

Yet again, Black and Potter were trying to stop their friend from eating Severus, but this time they were not doing as good of a job.

Breaths started becoming harder to draw, and the Slytherin felt his legs growing leaden. He saw Lily trying to grab something from her pocket, but couldn't get it without dropping Severus's hand, which he knew she would not do.

"When I say 'now,' " said Lily softly, barely heard over the pounding in Severus' ears, "jump. You might want to close your eyes."

They raced on, Severus now blindly following the tug of Lily's small yet strong hand. There was an ever-growing sound, not the werewolf but very loud nevertheless, rising in his ears. "Now!" Lily suddenly shouted.

Severus jumped up in the air, but did not land when he expected. He opened his eyes just in time to see the water they were about to hit. He closed his eyes...but didn't hit the water. Instead he landed in a pile of snow. Lily was already back on her feet, hands still cast toward the falls, turning each drop into soft, light snow.

"See? It comes in handy." Lily motioned Severus out of the snow. "Let's go," she said, still casting her magic at the falls.

The moment they were both off of the ice, Severus heard a howl that sent chills down his back. It had found a way down. Lily immediately hissed and thrust her hands even more forcefully at the snow. Suddenly, it all began to melt and scalding water hit the snow, melting it so rapidly that in scant minutes it had disappeared, leaving naught but boiling water.

"Here, take this," said Lily, digging something out of her pocket. 'Instant Portkey' the orange ball read. 'Quick get away in a ball.' "Tap it with your wand and say, 'Hogwarts Library,' " she instructed.

Lily collapsed back onto a tree, using some low branches as support. Severus tapped the orange ball with his wand. "Where would you like to go?" asked a gruff, deep voice, emitting quietly from the ball.

"Hogwarts Library," Severus said coolly. He should have known Lily would have something like this on her person. At least he had eliminated it before he took her to the Order of the Phoenix, for she would have vanished as soon as she was placed under Dumbledore's care.

"It'll activate in exactly one minute," Lily informed him breathlessly, searching the forest around her with unblinking eyes.

Another howl, even closer this time. Severus glared at the orange ball and walked over to where Lily was still leaning against a tree. "Go ahead and touch it," said Severus, holding the ball out to her. She laid her left hand across it.

Racing along her fingers frantically was the Mark of Salazar, hissing loudly with its eyes dilated. There was a sudden crash in the trees and Lily, Severus, and the tattoo all looked towards it. A bush was thrown aside and the werewolf came into view.

It seemed to smile, knowing that its prey was in reach. Severus had never really viewed Lupin as a threat, but suddenly he realized how much he had underestimated the Marauder.

“Thirty seconds,” Lily said quietly, murmuring out of one side of her mouth.

The werewolf suddenly lunged towards them, only to be knocked over by a large stag. The stag lowered its large antlers and rammed into the werewolf, causing it to howl, not in pain, but rage.

It swiped at the deer, leaving four lines of blood on its brown shoulder. That must be Potter, Severus thought in amazement. Does he even realize who he is saving once again?

The stag snorted and barreled forward again. The werewolf knocked the stag over mid-stride and picked it up with two massive, furry paws.

A huge black dog jumped onto the werewolf’s back and bit hard on its ear, causing Lupin to drop Potter on the ground. Beside him, Severus heard Lily counting down. “Five, four--”

Severus saw the stag roll over on its hooves and saw its eyes widen when he saw the humans he was saving. “One!”

The Slytherin felt a tug at his navel and the forest scene was gone, replaced by a whirlwind of swirling colors and harsh winds.

They hit the ground with a dull thud. Severus caught Lily by the arm as she fell forward, still weak with the Dark Magic she had used. “That was close,” said Severus as he straightened her back up.

“We’re not in our dorms yet,” said Lily quietly, looking around. “Look where we landed.”

Severus looked around curiously, the light of the candles on the wall banishing darkness. "Of the whole library, we had to land here?" he growled as he looked around the Restricted Section. "Filch checks here all the time!"

"Shh," whispered Lily, looking over to the entrance of the section. There; a bobbing lantern that illuminated the ill-kept clothes of one Argus Filch, resident caretaker and nightmare.

"He's blocking the exit," said Severus as Lily walked to the edge of a shelf to look at Filch. "It her finds us, we- What are you doing?"

"Stunning him," said Lily as though he was stupid to have had to ask.

"No!" Lily hushed him and turned back. "No," Severus whispered in alarm. "You can't Stun Filch. What'll Dumbledore say when he learns that the Stunner's in the school?"

"He'd be able to undo it so quick that he wouldn't notice that I had cast the spell," said Lily, but she turned to Severus anyways.

"He could, but someone else would probably try first. If the other teachers couldn't, he'd know right off!" Sure, Lily was the nicest person he knew, but it was scary to know what she could do with that wand of hers.

"We'd undo it before we got out of here. He'll be fine." She whirled around to see Filch a foot in front of her face.

"Got us some naughty students out of-"

The redhead jumped and a red light shot out of her wand and Filch flew backwards into the shelf of books and crumpled to the floor. A book fell off the shelf and opened with a thud, allowing deafening screaming to fill the castle. "Problem solved, let's go!" said Lily, racing past the still body of Filch. Severus bent down and checked his pulse and found it still happily pulsing.

Severus gave a sigh of relief and bolted after Lily. It would do no one good if they were found in the Restricted Section at midnight with an unconscious caretaker.

"I'll take you back to the Slytherin Common Room," said the redhead as he panted up beside her. They both looked around as the screaming book was silence, and its noise was replaced by that of shouting teachers. "That'll be them finding Filch," said Lily coolly.

"Let's go," Severus urged. The duo slipped down the stairs, descending to the dungeon.

The shouts behind them grew closer. "Albus!" McGonagall cried. "We've got to find him before he gets to the students!"

Lily cursed. "I didn't mean to Stun him! The spell just came from my mind. First the werewolf and now this!"

The portraits on the walls beside them were slowly awakening. "What are you kids-" began a portrait before being covered in a black cloth that spouted from Lily's wand. She cast the same spell on every picture they passed, so as to block any view of the Stunner and her accomplice.

However, that did not prevent the opposing sides from hearing each other. As one, the portraits let out a mixture of shouts such as "Quick, Headmaster, they're in my corridor!" and "Ack, why is everything suddenly so dark?"

Lily seemed to gain momentum with every step. Stray locks of hair had escaped from her tight ponytail and she was looking the most frazzled that Severus had ever seen her. Severus, unused to all the running he had been doing that night, felt as though his shoes had been replaced by blocks of concrete.

Seeing that the boy was lagging behind, Lily grabbed his hand. Instead of pulling him along like she had done earlier that night, he felt her transferring some of her power into him. He sped up, at first passing Lily, and then slowing to meet her slowed pace. "That

should... give you enough... strength to get to your dorms. I'll see you... tomorrow," Lily panted.

Severus nodded and raced forward. Lily would be returning to the Gryffindor Common Room... and passing right by the professors who were in hot pursuit.

Severus began to turn around, but an inner voice assured him that Lily knew what she was doing. Deciding to use Lily's gift in the way she planned for it to be used, Severus shot off to the Slytherin Common Room.

"Salazar," said Severus softly, breathing as calmly as if he was sleeping.

He raced down the stone stairs and into the boys' dormitory. He jumped on the bed and pulled the covers over his head, feigning sleep in case a teacher came up to check on the students. However, the moment the power borrowed from Lily wore off, Severus was already dead asleep.

YY
YY

Once Severus had gone, Lily turned towards the sounds of the approaching professors. The voices of the portraits were fading with Severus's footsteps. Formulating a quick plan to help Severus, Lily said as loudly and as manly as she could, "There, that spell will distract them while I escape out of the windows in the Great Hall."

Immediately, the blinded pictures began muttering to each other. "Dumbledore," one screeched, "he's headed towards to Great Hall!"

With practiced ease, Lily slipped into the shadows in the back corner of the nearest hallways. The hall was empty except for the door to an empty classroom on one of the sides. Matching the black shadows, Lily evened her ragged gasps into deep, quiet breathing.

Of course the first spell to pop out of her mind was to Stun Filch! Oh, why hadn't she realized what spell she had used before they had left the library?

Lily scowled. Every teacher in Hogwarts must be on her trail. Dizziness washed over her. After using her power to boil, ice and giving a great deal of what she had left to Severus, she was nearly powerless. If a teacher did find her, she'd have no power to fight back.

Using her Animagus ability to her advantage, Lily gave herself wolf ears and listened for the sounds of the teachers. The yells were fading into the distance. Lily took a deep breath and sighed gratefully.

Suddenly, her ears cocked as she heard the quiet shuffle of someone walking as quietly as they could towards her hallway. Lily quickly slipped her hood over her face, shadowing her eyes. By changing her eyes into those of her wolf Animagus, she was able to see a tall figure slipping down the hall.

Lily backed against the wall, causing her robes to brush against the rough stone, quite loudly to her enhanced ears. She held her breath as the figure's head jerked towards her.

"And the professors said you weren't smart, eh, Stunner?"

CLIFFHANGER!

That was long and MAJORLY ACTION-PACKED! So, I think I need an equally long and MAJORLY ACTION-PACKED REVIEW!

I need at least 15 reviews to update the next chapter, when you find out who the person is!

The person who guesses correctly first gets the next chapter dedicated to them!

Chapter 18: Lockdown

Lily stayed silent, watching the lithe man. A pair of black, beady eyes looked into the black hall over a broken nose. She recognized him immediately: the Auror, Alastor Moody.

“So, my elusive Stunner... finally trapped. You really had me stumped as to how you got in here, until good old Dumbledore found that used Instant Portkey in the library. Of course, that just adds another charge to your long list. Any two of your crimes can send you to Azkaban until you’re an old man, gray and crazy.” As he spoke, the man edged down the corridor.

Lily slowly reached her hand to her pocket for her wand, but found it missing. The Auror, as though sensing her confusion, said, “You can’t have been a Death Eater for more than ten years or so. Never put your wand in your pocket and run.” Looking with her night-vision eyes, Lily could see Moody twirling her wand over his fingers. “Let’s see who you are,” said Moody. “Lumos!”

Lily thrust out her left hand and used her magic to cover her face in the cloak of darkness, though her magic was barely strong enough to do even that. Her sleeve fell back, revealing a hissing snake tattoo racing along her arm, painfully obvious in the light emanating from his wand.

Beckoning her last ounce of power to come forth, the girl pushed her hand forwards and summoned her wand from Moody’s hand and was soon aiming her loyal wand straight at the Auror. Moody gasped, but was looking, not at the wand, but the tattoo behind it. “The Mark of Sal-”

“Stupefy!” said Lily as loudly as she could, trying to add the power of her voice into the strength of the spell.

The moment the red light hit the Auror, Lily stumbled past, the lingering Silencio spell cast so long ago caused her footfalls to be completely silent. How she made it to the Gryffindor Tower was a mystery to her, but she pondered on it little for sleep overtook her mere seconds after her head hit the pillow.

“Evans! Evans, get up!”

Lily opened her eyes to see Fairfield shaking her awake. For once, her face was bare of makeup and she had a terrified look on her face. “McGonagall’s getting everyone up. I think something’s wrong!”

“What time is it?” asked Lily calmly.

“5:30. Get up! Don’t get dressed, just throw on a dressing robe or something.”

Lily slipped out of bed and pulled on a dark green cloak over her silver silk pajamas. She walked with the Js down the stairs. “Lily!” called Tonks at the entrance of the first year girl dormitory. “Do you know what’s going on?”

Lily shook her head, but had a feeling that she knew exactly what was happening.

Once every Gryffindor was downstairs, McGonagall looked at them sadly. “Last night there was a break-in here. Luckily, we have an Auror staring here just for this reason and he was able to identify the intruder. Known as the Stunner, the intruder works very close to Lord Voldemort.” Murmuring ran through the crowd and Tonks looked very frightened, for her hair had just turned jet black as though she was trying to shrink inside of herself.

“Last night, the Stunner was in the Restricted Section of the Library for reasons unknown to us,” said Moody. “After Stunning Mr. Filch, who cannot give of any details on his appearance, he headed towards the Slytherin Common Room.”

“Probably to gather the other Death Eaters,” said a voice behind them.

Lily turned to look at a scowling Sirius Black. Moody continued as though he hadn’t heard Black’s comment. “However, he sent a decoy spell down the hall towards to room and tried to escape while the professors went on a wild goose chase towards the Great Hall.” McGonagall looked ashamed, and began examining her nails.

"I, however, had my suspicions that he was really going to escape a different way, so I went down and heard a noise in a dark corridor." Silence filled the Common Room as every student held their breath. "I used Lumos, but he was able to use wandless magic to stop the light from exposing his face. On his arm was the Mark of Salazar!"

"The Mark of Salazar?" repeated a frightened-looking third year. The rest of the room jumped, forgetting that there was anything in the room but the entrancing story.

McGonagall answered, "The Mark of Salazar is a living snake tattoo given to Slytherin's heir's and friends. Apparently, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and the Stunner are very good friends."

"Erm, excuse me?" asked Tonks, stepping forward. "Mr. Moody, er, if you caught him, then why are we all so worried?"

Moody scowled. "I had him cornered, but he used his wandless magic to take his wand back and Stun me," he said, rubbing the back of his head where he hit the ground. 'I hope it hurts,' thought Lily coldly. "I spent too much time, well, mocking him and not enough killing him." He took out his wand and made a poster fly and paste itself on the wall. On it was a Wanted sign.

'Wanted: The Stunner. Reward- 100,000 Galleons. 5'0-5'7. Has Mark of Salazar on left arm.' On the picture was a slightly inaccurate drawing of the Mark, for it was silver with green diamonds and had black pupils.

The real tattoo slipped down her arm and she looked at it. It was looking very nervous, the visual display of Lily's emotions. She quickly jerked the sleeve of her pajama shirt over her hand.

Moody walked forward. "To make sure the Stunner isn't among the students, we will be checking everyone's left arm for evidence of certain incriminating tattoos. Go get dressed and the search will begin at 9:00. Until we find the Stunner, this school will be on lockdown. Dismissed!"

“Can you believe it? The Stunner, here at Hogwarts!” said Tonks.

“Absolutely stunning,” said Lily flatly.

“So, Lily darling, how do you think he got in?” said a voice behind her.

Black was gazing at her curiously. Potter nudged him warningly, but he paid no heed. Lily shrugged. “Mr. Moody said he found a used Instant Portkey, didn’t he? One would assume that The Stunner used that to get in.”

Potter met her eyes in confusion. “Wha-”

“I do not believe I disclosed that piece of information,” growled a voice in her ear.

Lily froze. Without moving, she said, “Are you sure? I was almost positive that’s what you said.”

Moody grabbed her shoulders and spun her to meet his black eyes. She felt a probe poking her brain and she set up nearly every block she had.

“An Occlumens, eh? With red hair and small build...”

“Are you accusing Lily Evans of being Voldemort’s Stunner?” interrupted Potter protectively. “And what does red hair have to do with anything?”

“Blood red hair has been found at the scene of every crime committed by the Stunner,” said Moody. “She can prove herself innocent, though. Go get your wand.”

“Why waste your time? Just check for that tattoo and leave her alone,” said James fiercely.

“Is there a problem here, Alastor?” asked McGonagall sharply.

Moody growled under his breath and said loudly, “As soon as Miss Evans here shows me her arm there will be!”

Using every ounce of her power, she halted the Mark of Salazar at the highest point of her shoulder it could travel. With her right hand, she thrust up her sleeve and hissed, "There, not tattoo. May I leave now?"

Moody turned over Lily's pale arm, scouring for any mark of green ink. Lily began feeling faint. The power it took to stop the tattoo from sliding right underneath Moody's fingers was almost more than she could bear. Her irritated subconscious caused the snake to start hissing loudly.

"What was that?" asked Moody sharply. Lily immediately pulled her arm back and dropped the sleeve.

"That was me realizing how many of my rights you're violating right now. Unwarranted search and seizure, slander-"

"Searching with reasonable suspicion is perfectly legal!" growled Moody. "As an Auror, I must have constant vigilance. Seeing a redheaded, petite person inside of Hogwarts who happens to know that we found an Instant Portkey at the scene of a crime really strikes me as suspicious."

"You checked me yourself for the Mark! Would you like to check my wand, too?"

"If you wouldn't mind..." said Moody, bowing mockingly towards the stairs.

Minutes later, Lily was watching as Moody looked over her wand. "It looks like the one I found last night, but I know one way to know for certain. Finite Incantum!"

You like? You don't like? REVIEW

Chapter 19: Realization

From the wand came a faint, white glow. "It's Lumos," said Lily calmly. "I used it last night so that I could read while my roommates were sleeping."

"Don't try to lie, Miss Evans," said Moody scathingly. "I am also told by this spell when you used the spell... mere minutes ago."

"Yes, to walk down the stairs, right Lils? I had to also, because it's too early for the candles to be lit yet."

Moody scowled at Tonks, who glared right back at him. McGonagall grabbed the Auror's arm. "Come, Alastor. We still have to tell the Ravensclaws and Hufflepuffs." Moody looked back threateningly at Lily over his shoulder, but followed McGonagall placidly.

"Thanks Tonks," said Lily softly. "I had forgotten that I had to use it on the stairs."

Tonks looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "I was just covering for you. The candles are lit. Now, really, where were you last night?"

"In my dorm," whispered Lily, making sure to keep all worry out of her eyes as she met Tonks's. "I got in at curfew and stayed in."

"Then why," asked Tonks coldly. "were you not there when I came to see you at 10:30?"

"I was in the bathroom... I had forgotten to brush my teeth," said Lily after a slight pause.

"Jessica, Jennifer and that other blonde said that they hadn't seen you since classes ended," argued Tonks.

"What, is this 'Everyone accuse Lily Evans Day'? Leave me alone," she hissed before stalking up the stairs to her dorm to get in some sleep in case Moody was going to check her again later.

"Are you sure she wasn't here last night?" asked James again.

Tonks nodded. "I don't know what's up with her lately." James ran a hand through his hair in exasperation. If Lily kept acting like this, the Marauders would never be able to figure out what was happening to her.

The three Marauders aware of Lily's secrets and Tonks were seated in the boys' dormitory, safe from any prying eyes and ears.

No matter how enclosed the room was, James still whispered his next sentence. "We do."

"What?" yelled Tonks.

"Hush," Sirius scolded. "That's not helping anyone, least of all Evans."

"You know what's up with Lils," Tonks hissed in a scary imitation of Lily, "and you didn't tell me?" Her hair turned hot orange in indignation.

"Well, we weren't positive until just recently," said Remus, blushing. It was this red coloring that lit Remus's cheeks as he spoke to Tonks that caused Sirius and James to suspect the werewolf had a crush on the fiery, young Metamorphmagus.

"Yeah, so you know about her new dad, right?" asked James. Tonks nodded, hair paling as her anger cooled. "We think-

"We know that he's the Stunner. Dumbledore practically told us," interjected Sirius.

Remus blinked. "No..."

"What?" asked James and Sirius sharply.

"No, Dumbledore told us to run when we saw him."

"So?" asked James in complete confusion.

“So, Dumbledore wouldn’t have known the Stunner by name because, well, no one knows his name. Now, tell me the one man that Dumbledore would think would attack us in public and that the three of us, all top duelists of our year, couldn’t stand a little chance against, even together.”

James shook his head. “There isn’t anyone, except-”

“Voldemort,” said Sirius slowly. “Marvolo Smith is Lord Voldemort.”

Interesting... The Marauders know that Lily’s ‘father’ is Voldemort, but they don’t know that she’s the Stunner... yet.

Oh, yeah, and apologies for the shortness of the chapter, but I'll update tomorrow or the next day to make up for it.

Chapter 20: Trust

Severus sat in a tightly knit circle in the back of the dark Slytherin Common Room with Bellatrix, Regulas and Narcissa Black, Rudolphus, Bo Crabbe and Geroge Goyle. "Severus," growled Rudolphus. "You're the spell man here. Know anything we can use?"

Severus smirked and pulled out his beloved copy of Advanced Potions. "As a matter of fact, a spell I was working on over the summer could be just what we need."

The group of Slytherins were trying to find a spell to cover their Dark Marks for when Moody was checking them for tattoos. "But, this spell is untested, and, if my calculations are correct, will last for mere minutes."

"I think we should not hide out loyalty!" cried Bellatrix passionately. Her sister quickly hushed her. "Why let an Auror slip from our grasp?" whispered Bellatrix.

Severus shook his head patronizingly. "If we were any other place with any other Auror, I would agree with you. But we're in Hogwarts, going against Alastor Moody. We could never do anything like that under the Headmaster's nose." He continued before Bellatrix could interrupt. "We're no use to our Master dead, which is what we would be if Moody found us."

Narcissa nodded, twisting her engagement ring around her long finger nervously. The fire turned her hair light pink and she looked like she hadn't slept in days. "Severus is right. Now, how do you do this spell?"

Severus flipped to the middle of his book and explained the pronunciation and wand motions for the spell. "But remember, cast it as late as you can, because it would be disastrous if it appeared before his eyes... he'd double-check us all and they'd get to fill a dozen calls in Azkaban in one go."

"Why don't we just tell him who the Stunner is in return for us getting out clean? I've heard of others doing that," said Regulas.

“Imbecile,” muttered Severus. “Listen, Regulas, and try to comprehend. You give away and it won’t be the Aurors after you... it’ll be the Dark Lord. Besides, do you really think that Alastor Moody is going to make a deal with you? He’d arrest you and the Dark Lady. That is, of course, if she doesn’t kill you first.”

The circle grew silent for a minute. Finally Regulas scoffed, “The mudblood doesn’t have the guts.”

It was Narcissa that looked scornfully at her cousin now. “Dear Reggie, are you quite aware of Lady Velisna’s record. If memory serves right, she’s responsible for at least a hundred murders. How many have you planned, my dead little cousin?” The young Black was silent, and his sallow face flushed dark red.

“Have we yet affirmed that we are not going to reveal the Stunner?” asked Bellatrix lazily. When no one replied, she said, “Good. Now, meeting dismissed.”

As the Slytherins left, Narcissa approached Severus, twirling a lock of white-blond hair around her finger. “Now, I know we’re not going to give her secret away, but what if Evans gives them our names? They’d let her go!”

Severus shook his head with a small grin. “You’re forgetting the Auror we’re talking about. Lady Velisna knows his reputation. Besides, she’s Gryffindor. She has loyalty... only, unlike the others, her loyalty is on our side. No worries. Lady Velisna would never give Dumbledore the names of Death Eaters.” Narcissa nodded, relief shining in her eyes.

As she walked away, Severus watched her long, blond hair sway beautifully across her back. ‘It’s not Lily you should be scared of. I’m the one who gave your name to Dumbledore. I’m the half-blood Slytherin who became the first turncoat in Death Eater history.’ For some unknown reason, it was not just guilt that Severus felt, but also triumph. He had finally proved that, though a measly half-blood, Severus was still able to change history. Imagine that. (A/N: The 2nd

half-blood to change history after Severus will be Harry Potter! Ah, the irony.)

There was a tap on his shoulder. Severus turned around to see Professor Slughorn. "Dumbledore wanted to see you, old chap. He said now, so you're excused from that ridiculous tattoo thing."

Severus nodded and left the Common Room quickly, lest any of his peers try to stop him.

'What could he want now?'

Once he got to the gargoyle, he was interrupted before he could say the password. "What're you doing in front of the Headmaster's office, boy? Shouldn't you be heading down to the screening room?" An iron clamp gripped his upper arm. Severus glanced over at Moody, who was scowling fiercely.

"Dumbledore asked for me," Severus said, icing over his obsidian eyes to block out the inevident mind probe.

Moody laughed, sounding like he was truly delighted by the excuse. "We'll just see about that, then, won't we boy? Chocolate éclairs!" he shouted at the stone gargoyle. The stone scraped loudly over the rough floor as it moved to reveal the hidden staircase. Moody dragged Severus up the stairs and burst into the office. "Dumbledore!" The old man looked up from his papers.

"Ah, hello Alastor. I see you've found Mr. Snape. Good. Now," he said, turning from the baffled Auror to Severus. "I am simply furious at myself for not asking you thins before; Do you know who the Stunner is?"

Severus swallowed his worry. "Well, very few Death Eaters know who he is..."

Moody growled at him. "Just answer the question."

"Yes," said Severus quietly.

Moody blinked. "What?"

"Yes, I know who the Stunner is, but I cannot speak the name to any Light worker. Professor," he said to Dumbledore, "do you remember when I, well, hinted that I knew someone who worked for Voldemort, but didn't want to, but had to because of her family?"

"Her?" asked Moody sharply. Dumbledore just nodded as though he hadn't heard Moody.

"Well," Severus took a deep a breath. "I told you that she was dangerous, but I didn't tell you that she was the Stunner because then you might not help her, but last night I decided that even though she doesn't want you to help her, she needs your help, so I need you to put her sister in safe house and put her somewhere safe from the Dark Lord so she doesn't have to Stun anyone anymore. It would... help both of you," he finished, straightening his robes uncomfortably.

"Third floor, fourth corridor, sixth hallway, second door down. Bring her there at noon, while the students are still being checked. The Order of the Phoenix will be waiting for you, Mr. Snape," said Dumbledore firmly.

Severus nodded, shrugged off Moody's slackened grip and left. "Are you sure you trust him?" asked Moody darkly as Severus closed the door.

"With my life, Alastor. I'd trust Mr. Snape with my life." A faint smile drifted across Severus's sallow face. Trust was sometimes better than a hot chocolate fudge cake with vanilla ice cream.

“Did they already check you?” asked a quiet voice in Lily’s ear. She calmly turned to face Severus and nodded. “Then come with me. There’s something I have to show you.”

Lily followed Severus back up the flight of stairs she had just descended. Once the pair reached the third floor, Severus walked straight forward. Lily caught up to him easily. “Did you get back to your dorm okay?” she asked softly.

“Yeah, thanks to that power surge,” he replied, looking at the doors they passed. Lily caught a glimpse of emotion in his eyes: worry.

“What is this that you want to show me?” she asked monotonously, though a rush of foreboding raced through her veins.

“It’s a surprise, but I can tell you that it’s something you haven’t seen in a long, long time.” He opened a door and led her into a pitch black room. “A chance for freedom,” he finished. Cold rushed through Lily’s body as the candles were lit and she found herself facing the entirety of the Order of the Phoenix.

James was nervous. Though the Marauders had been official members of the Order of the Phoenix since the beginning of the summer, this was the first time James had ever been in any real danger. What made the mission even more perilous was the fact that both Dumbledore and Moody, the Order’s top wizards, were both down in the Great Hall checking the students for tattoos that they all knew were not going to show up. Now, apparently, an Order member who remained anonymous was going to bring the Stunner straight into their trap. James clenched his wand tightly and growled under his breath. There was no way that the Stunner could escape after being held at wandpoint by every member of the Order of the Phoenix. Then again, he’d escaped out of tighter corners.

The doorknob clicked and he heard the sound of somebody entering the dark room. Suddenly, the candles flickered on and James found himself staring at Snape and Evans.

Of course! It all made sense to James now. Evans was spying on Voldemort. And she had been hanging around Snape because she

knew that he was the Stunner! He was relieved that Snape had never Stunned James; probably too worried about his cover being blown.

“Stupefy!” yelled James, Sirius, Remus and about half of the Order. Twenty red lights knocked Snape to the ground. As the Order let out a triumphant cheer, Evans backpedaled quickly and grabbed the knob. She jerked it fiercely, but it had locked magically behind her.

As she turned on the Order with her wand, they quickly realized their mistake. “Stupefy!” she hissed. Ten members of the Order crumpled to the ground.

Sirius cursed from beside James. “Evans is the Stunner!” James rolled his eyes and aimed his wand at Evans.

She thrust out a hand and a wall of fire surrounded her enemy. James watched several people conjure water to toss on the flames. He saw Evans, Voldemort’s Stunner and daughter, stalk around the room, searching for escape. With the firelight dancing over her blood red hair, she looked like a caged tiger, silently pacing; deadly and looking for escape into the world.

Suddenly, her eyes met his and he saw raw anger glistening through the piercing emeralds. Several spells bounced off the flames in front him, all aimed for the Stunner. Apparently the fire was a force field, making it impossible for any curses to hit her. She placed her wand to her throat and the Order went silent, ready to hear their fate.

“I am going to assume you are who I think you are and say this. You and Dumbledore should not have even tried, for now it will be disastrous for you all. I cannot let you set the Ministry after me, so I’ll leave you in that ring of fire as I go far from this place,” Evans stated. The Order blinked unanimously. Surely she knew that they would be able to get out of the fire, so why didn’t she just kill them now?

“But no worries,” she continued. “You will never see me again.” She removed the wand from her throat and pointed it at the wall. The stone vanished and she ran out of the room... straight into the waiting arms of Alastor Moody and Albus Dumbledore.

The Auror plucked the wand out of her grasp before Lily could even comprehend what had just happened. Moody had her arms pinned behind her back before she could react to what she finally comprehended had just happened.

Lily snarled and tried to kick away, but Moody was too strong. "I knew it was you," he growled into her ear. Dumbledore looked over at the trapped Order and cast a spell to douse the flames. Lily glared at the Order, who looked ashamed that they were so easily beaten.

Dumbledore pointed his wand at Lily and she met his blue eyes challengingly. "Miss Evans... how I wish you have come for help on your own free will. Be thankful that you have a great friend like Mr. Snape. Ennervate." Severus opened his eyes and walked groggily over to Lily.

He met her eyes sadly. "I'm sorry, Lily, but this was the right thing for me to do."

Lily felt hatred rise unbidden within her. "I hate you," she whispered. Power rose within her and, with a newly strengthened voice, screeched, "I hate you!" before Dumbledore's Stunning spell knocked her into unconsciousness.

I swear that I had tears in my eyes when I wrote this, so please review! Can anyone figure out why she's now able to talk? Dedication to the first correct answer!

With only one week left until Winter Break, Severus could barely stand staying in school. Lily had just been confined to Order Headquarters; an old, deserted hotel in Muggle Liverpool.

He had to see her. She loathed him now, but he didn't care. Her safety, willing or not, was his sole concern. He had been watching her torn emotions eating her from the inside for months; raw feeling tearing at her very soul.

He knew from experience how it felt to be ever on your mental guard. Even around Severus, her one true friend, Lily was never able to be the Lily she had been before ever encountering Voldemort and the twisted world of magic. Though she never showed her guilt of being who, what, she was, Severus could only imagine how the stolen lives were weighing down her petite shoulders.

Emotions were what set humans apart from other creatures; by being able to feel guilt, to feel hate, to feel love, humans were given strength. In Lily's case, her emotions were always held at bay, and it affected her ability to be herself. It showed in her voice. It stayed blank and quiet until emotion consumed her, and then her voice was elevated back to human potential. Severus just wished that it hadn't been him that had sparked her flame of anger so fiercely. In gaining the trust of Dumbledore, he had lost the trust of the person he cared for most.

"Severus!" whispered Narcissa frantically, jolting him out of his reverie. "Do you think He will kill us?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Narcissa. Now, what's wrong?" he asked, though he knew exactly what her fear was about.

"The Stunner's gone! We got a letter from... Marvolo Smith today asking for her. I thought she was with Him, didn't you? We were supposed to watch after her! What is Dumbledore caught her?"

"Narcissa!" Severus hissed. The blonde quieted, but tears were formed in her opaque blue eyes. "If something like that did happen to the Dark Lady, not saying that it has, but if it did, we could not have stopped it. The Dark Lord knows this," Severus drawled. "Now, wipe

away your tears and quiet down. Talk to Bella, she'll tell you the same."

"But I can't find Bella either," sobbed Narcissa.

"What's going on here?" asked Bellatrix from behind them. As Narcissa turned to weep to her sister, Severus picked up his books to leave. "Oh, and Severus," said Bellatrix. "would you mind writing back to the Dark Lord and explaining this whole mess? You are the best with words."

Severus nodded and grabbed the letter from Bellatrix's waiting hand. He retired to his dorms to explain to the most evil wizard in the world that he and the other Hogwarts Death Eaters had lost Lady Velisna. He just hoped that Voldemort wouldn't take out his anger on the messenger.

Severus tapped his fingers on the desk as Professor Williams passed out the timed writing papers. "Okay, guys and gurls!" he said enthusiastically. "You have thirty minutes to finish the essay, which is part of 30 of your grade! Go ahead and start!"

Severus scanned the topic sentence and grinned. An essay on how Dementors performed their soul sucking duties. This would be easy. He heard Crabbe and Goyle groan behind him and could almost hear the stupidity radiating off of them.

Severus dipped his eagle feather quill into the black ink and began throwing words onto the paper, ever annoyed by the sluggish pace that his hand was making against his mind.

He let himself lose his thoughts in the meaningless essay, blocking out his worries for Lily.

"Time!" called the professor. Severus, who had simply been scanning for misspelled words, dropped his quill, only to pick up all of his troubled thoughts.

"Enjoy your break!" said Professor Williams jovially.

"You too," said the Hufflepuffs as they exited the room. Severus felt like wrapping their little yellow scarves around their cheerful little necks and going Phantom of the Opera on them. Stupid, happy, careless Flufflepuffs.

Severus slinked back to the Slytherin Common Room and ran right into Rudolphus LeStrange on his way up the stairs.

"Where are you off to in such a rush?" asked the large Slytherin lazily, leaning against the stone wall. Course hair shadowed his square jaw and his black hair looked as though it had never seen shampoo. Rudolphus was always the first Slytherin to send the new little first years on some frivolous errand just to prove he could.

"Just eager to get out of this place," drawled Severus. Rudolphus agreed heartily and Severus relaxed. He wouldn't be the one to realize the real reason Severus was in such a hurry.

"Oh yeah, and Severus... Better watch your back.... I hear Potter's scouring the whole bloody school looking for you."

Severus grimaced a smile. "Thanks for the warning, Rudolphus." The other Slytherins never helped Severus in his never-ending war against the Marauders; actually, they seemed to find it amusing.

He entered the dark seventh year boys' dormitory with a heavy heart. Bo Crabbe and George Goyle looked up at him for a second before returning to their invigorating game of Bloody Knuckles.

The boy went over to his long-packed trunk and cast a spell to make it float obediently behind him. He walked upstairs calmly and was almost out of the Common Room when Bellatrix called him back. "The train doesn't leave for another hour, Severus. Come over here," she said imperiously.

Severus slid over and stood vigilantly behind Narcissa's armchair. "That spell of yours really worked," said Antoni Dolohov lazily.

Severus nodded, accepting their gratitude. "Be looking out for my owl," Bellatrix said. "I think we'll be having a meeting soon... once the Dark Lord learns that we lost Lady Velisna. It's your fault, you know."

"My fault?" repeated Severus, nonplussed.

"Your fault the Dark Lord knows now," said Bellatrix matter-of-factly.

"You told me to tell him," said Severus.

"Huh?" said Crabbe, Goyle and the newest recruit, MacNair, together.

Bellatrix, however, just shrugged. "And, you were the first one of us to realize that she was who she was, so she was your responsibility."

Realizing that Severus could never argue with Bellatrix's twisted logic, he gave a small bow and left the Common Room with his suitcase trailing humbly behind him.

He scowled at nearly every portrait he passed and felt like kicking the innocent suits of armor. He had been so busy worrying about Lily that he had almost stopped worrying about himself. The Dark Lord would be on the rampage looking for his daughter, and Severus wouldn't be at the Snape house, where Voldemort might expect him to be. No, the deserted Snape house would remain as such and Severus would be having a jolly old Christmas with the jolly old Order of the Phoenix in an entire house's worth of people who don't trust him and one girl who hates his guts.

As his thoughts drifted once again to Lily, he didn't even notice that he was about to run into a tall, black haired boy.

"Why, hello Sni- Snape! James, Remus and I were just looking for you!" said the boy, pulling him back up to his feet.

"Black," he said shortly by way of greeting.

"Let's get to the point," said Potter.

“Ah, yes, the point. Always a good place to start, don’t you think so, Moony?” said Black happily.

Looking at him closely, Severus noticed that Black had a bright red Santa’s hat perched on his head in place of his wizards’ hat. Severus forced himself to look away from Black and back at Potter, who was glaring at Black.

“Right. Well, we know that you’re on the good side now, so I think we should call a truce. You are going to be staying at HQ with us over the break, right?” Potter said.

Severus blinked, and swayed on his feet, feeling slightly nauseous. Christmas... with the Marauders. Was Dumbledore trying to kill him? Nothing could have made his day weirder.

It was at that moment that Peeves shot by overhead, arms full of parchments. “Peeves!” hollered Professor Williams. The bald professor raced by. “Give those here!”

“Nuh, uh! I get lots of money for doing this!” Peeves cackled.

“Peeves, are you the one with the robes and no hair? No! So, gimme those papers!”

“Look out below!” the poltergeist said before snapping his fingers, causing the timed writings to shoot up in flame.

“NOOOOOOOOOO!” cried the professor. Severus blinked as the man leapt up off his knees and said, “Well, off to Mexico!” he conjured a broomstick that was painted to look like a parrot and turned his wizard hat into a sombrero. “Adios, boys!” he called the frozen Marauders and Severus before throwing a bag of Galleons to Peeves and zooming out the window. Okay, that was one thing that added the weird cherry on his weird day.

Turning his attention back on the boys, eyed them curiously. “A truce?” said Severus warily.

“Just until we get Lily back on her feet,” said Lupin calmly, not at all fazed by the Peeves incident. “I mean, we shouldn’t act like we hate each other in front of her, right? She’s mad enough as it is without blowing up the hotel to get revenge against because of some prank.”

Severus took a deep breath and met each of their eyes. “When working with the Dark Lord, I have to pretend to feel things that I don’t and pretend to like people I don’t. When I’m working with the Order, I am not going to continue acting. You pretend all you want, but I am never going to call a truce with you. No matter what happens between us, I will always hate you, and nothing is going to change that,” he finished. He left the boys standing there and got on the train early, planning what he was going to say to Lily when he finally saw her.

Now, the thing about Williams and Peeves is sort of an inside joke and comic relief to the serious tone of the story. Please review and gimme your thoughts!

Also, I decided to add a little question to push your minds at the end of most chapters, so here's question number one. If it was a choice between saving yourself and ONE loved one (spouse, sibling, parent) and sentencing one hundred other people to death, which would you choose

You can give me your answer in a review, or you can just think about it to yourself. I want my fic to open thoughts for you, so, choose your answer you don't want to answer, I would love to see predictions of where you think this fic is going. I already have it planned out, but if there's a really good scene you have in mind, let me know and I can incorporate it into the story. If your guess is completely off, then I get a good laugh. Just kidding. I really want to know what you think.

OH!! also wanted to clarify reviewer said that this was the climax of this fic. Not quite right. If my plans work out, this is about half-way through the fic. This story will either go until Lily and James get married, or when they announce their engagement. No, I will not go into all those details of before the wedding/engagement. Maybe the last two chapters will skip ahead in time a bit to the proposal and

ceremony. Trust me, I have big plans for this; I will try not to let it get to dull! PLEASE REVIEW!

Lily could not believe it. After six years of being on her guard and stopping anyone from ever figuring out who she was, she was finally caught. She had woken up tied to a chair in what she soon learned was the Order's headquarters and been fiercely questioned by Alastor Moody. Of course, Dumbledore did not support use of the Cruciartus Curse, so Lily was able to keep all of her information to herself. Nothing the Order could say or do could cause her to tell them anything.

However, Moody had been able to get Dumbledore to approve of pain if she lied. He wanted to make sure that if she did tell them something that it was the truth, and that it wouldn't hurt anyone.

She slumped against her bonds and glared once again at the plain door that blocked her from freedom. It was a shame that she needed her hands to use wandless magic, for, with her powers, she could have been in Brazil in the blink of an eye.

Three times a day, Moody would charge in and give her ten minutes to stretch, use the restroom and eat a small meal. Then he'd ask her a few questions (which got little response) and then storm away. From the noises that came from downstairs, Lily could easily guess that, even if she got past Moody, she'd be met with at least a dozen Order members.

Being tied in a small, unfurnished room really plays tricks on the brain, as Lily soon figured out. The first two days she was perfectly content in the room, using one of the advanced branches of Occlumency to keep her mind separated from her still body, but soon, boredom caused her to want to explode. The thoughts she had been able to hold back over the past few years were the only things she had to entertain herself.

She was a Gryffindor. She knew that, in her position, Severus and many other people she knew would have done exactly as she had done; chosen the life of her sister over that of other peoples' and her own. Petunia had no clue that her life was in Lily's hands at all times. Every time Lily Stunned somebody, knowing that a Death Eater would soon follow her to kill them, she had to think of the life she was saving; the life of her sister.

Of course, she now thought bitterly, Petunia was one of the meanest people Lily had met. There was no real reason why Lily chose to save her sister and not the innocent Muggles, but she supposed it was the fact that Petunia was the one she knew. She loved Petunia deep down. So deep down, in fact, that the emotion was merely a subconscious feeling. When she actually thought about it, Petunia had been nothing but annoyed with the fact that Lily had been exposed to the magical world. Though Petunia would never have given her whole life for Lily, the girl found that now she was protecting someone who had absolutely no gratitude for the pain Lily went through for her sake. She wished she didn't always feel she had to do the same as Robin did...

Lily jumped at her own thoughts. She had not thought of Robin in a long time. The memories of what had happened were so painful that Lily had been able to block them out, but now, trapped in a room alone with her thoughts, the memories were her life.

"Robin," she whispered brokenly. Lily bit her lip and refused to let even a single tear slip down her face.

"She's been doing that all week," said Moody gruffly. James, Sirius, Remus, and Snape all stood behind the wall, watching her. "Of course, she doesn't know that we can see her, or else she'd be trying the find ways to kill us."

James watched her silently. Snape spoke from beside him. "Can we see her?"

"You're looking at her now, aren't you, boy?" said Moody in annoyance.

"No, I mean, can I, we, speak to her?" the boy said. James had never seen this side of Snape before. It almost scared him, to see that there can be so much more to a person than meets the eye. Take Evans for example. The Marauders had been inches away from figuring her out for months, and now that it had finally come out, James didn't feel any better. He could not remember why he ever wanted to know what was wrong with her.

Sirius said, "We'd really like to talk to her." James looked over at him. The usually cheerful boy looked as though seeing Evans like this was a major reality check. The sparkle was gone from his silver eyes, and all that was left was a determined glint.

Moody raised a thick eyebrow. "If you all go in together..." he said, tilting his head at Snape to make his point. It was painfully obvious that Moody trusted Snape about as much as he trusted Voldemort, but he looked as though he was seriously considering the proposition.

"Go ahead. You guys talk to her while I make a pot of mint tea. It'll calm you down afterwards," he said.

"Why would we need something to calm us down after just talking to her?" asked Sirius.

Moody raised an eyebrow at him. "Trust me," he growled before turning on his heel and heading down to the hotel kitchens.

"Let's go," said James, taking a deep breath. He looked once more through the two-way wall and his determination was renewed.

The four boys stood in front of the door uncertainly. Room 326, the room Evans was being held in, was in the middle of a long row of white doors on the third floor of the Piton Hotel. It was possibly the most secure room in the building, as it was centered in the very middle. The room to the left was the room in which they could observe Evans, and the room to the right was Moody's bedroom. Across the hall was Kingsley Shacklebolt, one of the newer recruits. Fresh out of Hogwarts and in Auror training, Kingsley was the strongest person James knew, and between him and Moody, Evans would never be able to escape.

Sirius was the one that opened the door. Evans's emerald eyes shot open and she glared at the boys as they entered. As Snape came in last and closed the door behind him, a hissing sound came from her.

James saw the infamous snake tattoo racing down her pale arm, illuminated by the candles floating by the walls. The tattoo raced to her hand, which was tied behind her back where James could not see.

“Hello Black, Potter, Lupin... Snape,” she acknowledged coldly.

The Slytherin seemed at a loss for words. He finally croaked, “You called me Snape.”

“That’s your name, isn’t it?” asked Sirius. Snape turned to Sirius, but seemed to not be able to think of a sufficient comeback.

Evans looked at Snape emotionlessly. “I only call my friends by their first names.”

“But, you don’t call anyone by their first name!” exclaimed Sirius hotly.

“I think that’s her point,” mumbled Remus, elbowing Padfoot hard in the ribs.

“Why are you here?” she asked softly. Without waiting for the answer, she tilted her head up at Sirius. “I bet you feel stupid,” she said icily. “You danced around the truth for ages without figuring it out.”

Sirius walked forward and knelt in front of Evans. Suddenly, James was worried what Sirius was going to say; he was known to be utterly rash at times.

“How did your parents die?” he asked, so quietly that James almost missed the question.

Evans looked as though he’d slapped her for a split second, before putting a blank mask on her face. “Why ever do you think they’re dead?”

James opened his mouth, but Remus nudged him into silence. Sirius didn’t say anything either. Evans sighed. “I never knew my parents; they died when I was born.”

Suddenly, a siren louder than a foghorn went off and Evans clenched her teeth and braced her shoulders.

Remus caught on first. "Where does it hurt?" he shouted, going over to her and kneeling next to Sirius. She didn't answer and her eyes closed as though she was blocking everything out.

Just as quickly as they had turned on, the sirens went off. Moody entered the room and said, "Lucky I was checking up on you. That means she told a lie," he said gruffly, pointing at the ceiling. He went behind her and messed with the metal cuffs on her hands.

"Is she okay?" asked James quickly, for she had not opened her eyes yet.

"She'll live. The spell just tightens her cuffs and burns her a bit," said Moody carelessly.

James walked around and saw that the cuffs were thin, sharp metal. "How hot do they get?"

"Well, they turn red if it's a normal lie, and white if it's a lie that could hurt somebody. You know, I can't figure out why she keeps doing this. Lying, and letting herself go unconscious," said Moody.

"She's not unconscious," said Snape. "It's just a certain type of Occlumency. It lets her escape from her body for a few minutes. It reduces all pain by about half. She's a very skilled Occlumens," he finished.

"So we learned," said Moody in annoyance. "Well, there's a button in the other room that turns off the sirens, so you all should be able to handle it while I'm downstairs. The tea's almost ready." He stuck his tongue out at Evans and left.

The door had been closed for a minute when Evans opened her eyes again. "It was your fault, you know," she said softly.

"That you lied?" asked James blankly.

"That they died," she said. The sirens stayed silent, but James found himself wishing that they would go off. Could it really be his fault that he parents died? "I could have stopped Him, but your stupid spell wouldn't let me use magic."

"You mean that one that stopped you from breaking school rules?" asked Remus. She nodded.

"How did they die?" asked Sirius once again.

"He killed them," she murmured.

"And then you became a killer like him," said Sirius coldly.

"No, not like him. He killed in order to kill more. I kill to stop a killing," said Evans softly.

"Who's Robin?" asked James.

Evans's eyes grew wide and the tattoo started hissing again. "Get out of here! Never say his name again! Out!" she hissed.

Snape raced forward. "Lily-"

"Because of your ignorance, everything I've done is for nothing! He's going to kill her and it's all your fault. Thanks, friend."

"No, listen! Pe-"

"I hate you all!" she hissed. The sirens began wailing and Evans's eyes snapped shut.

"Let's go," said Remus. They closed the door and went to the other room to turn off the sirens.

The four boys trooped down to the kitchens, forgetting their own differences as they thought of the Stunner upstairs. Snape was muttering to himself. "I've got to tell her that her sister's safe. I've got to tell her..."

They all slumped into the chairs around the table and began to slowly drink the tea that was already set out in mugs for them.

“Told you that you’d need it,” said Moody knowingly.

“So, basically, it is my job to get information, and, if possible, recruit you to the cause,” finished the man. Lily gazed up at him dully. His name, as he had readily given, was Edgar Bones. Green and gold eyes sat somberly under a lock of thick brown hair, and the recently named Auror was tall and muscular from years of training.

He had yet to call her, as Moody did, ‘Stunner’, and Lily found herself relieved. Though that had indeed been her occupation for the last six years, it was not a thing she enjoyed dwelling on. From the sounds around the hotel, she assumed that Father Christmas would be arriving in a few days time, what with Black robustly singing Christmas carols from all corners of the building.

“Any questions?” asked Bones. At her silent stare, he clapped his hands and said, “Good. Well, no use sitting here twiddling our thumbs! Let’s get started, Lily.”

She blinked. For some reason, she had assumed that all the Order members had been informed only of her last name; Moody would certainly not let ‘Lily’ slip through his lips.

Bones conjured a chair, twirled it around and sat down, resting his head on the back of it. “Anything you’d like to say to start us off?” he asked amiably.

“Go to-” she stopped, deciding that cursing would not be the right path of action. Plus, she had never expressed such rage (other than with Snape) for a long time, and would not let this Auror provoke her, whether he meant to or not. She bit her lip and shook her head.

He pulled out his wand and waved it around the room for a minute or so, with Lily watching him silently, albeit curiously. “That’ll stop any use of magic in here; at least, any magic without a wand.” He seemed to have no worries that she would manage to obtain his wand, and, though she had been through six summers of intense training, had doubts on her own abilities to defeat this man in combat. “Now, I am no Legilimens, but the lie detector is still up, so if you’re gonna talk, make it the truth. First, I’ll confess something to you. I do not approve of torture, generally speaking. I have, and will, use it as a final step in defense. I especially disagree with Alastor on his stance on your cuffs.

He says perfect plan, I say unnecessary, especially since your friend told us that you're able to reduce it by half anyways. Don't get me wrong. I can tell from your scars that it still hurts. Why add injury to insult? We'll all know you're lying and we'll just move on. But," he said, frost suddenly dusting his words, "I'll set those babies to their highest frequency and roast you if you hurt anybody here. Understand?"

Lily had to physically stop herself from nodding. She would not go down just because some pretty boy gave her a threat. She didn't ask for this, and was not going from slave of the Dark to slave of the Light; she just wanted the freedom to choose for herself.

"I got Alastor to turn off the heat of the cuffs until he's back in charge, which, by the way, is when I walk out of here. If you're good, after a few days we'll take them off during our sessions." Bones was quite the optimistic fellow.

Lily kept her face smooth. She knew that this man could be as dangerous as the Dark Lord to her, and she would not put her guard down because he was being so cheerful.

"Are you even going to move again while I'm in here?" he asked suddenly. Lily forced herself not to jump or move in any way. He raised a hand, and she couldn't help it; she flinched. But all he did was run it through his mass of brown hair. She kept her face blank as though she hadn't reacted, but the look in his eyes affirmed that he had noticed.

"Go ahead; say something. Anything. I dare you," he said with a grin. Suddenly, his face fell. "Here I am trying to talk to the Stunner. You got my cousin, you know. Deborah Bush. Do you even recognize the name?"

Lily whispered, "I'm not informed of names. When and where; that's all."

"See, now we're getting somewhere!" he said. "Ever been given a 'why'? Or a 'how'?"

Running out of patience, Lily hissed, "I'm the Stunner. What do expect, I'm supposed to throw daisies at them?"

"See? Talking is good. Let out all the anger," he coaxed. At her silence, he said, "Let me tell you a little about Debbie. She was smart, funny... always had a joke handy. Debbie was also an artist. I remember once, a couple of years ago, she locked herself in her room and painted a mural of forty-seven cats. She was so-"

"July 12th, 4965 Dovescote Lane," Lily whispered suddenly.

"What?" he said sharply.

"I only learn the when and where," she said again.

Bones rose suddenly. "That's all we have time for today. We'll continue this tomorrow." He banished his chair and left the room.

Her handcuffs gave a sting as they turned back to full alertness and she sighed softly.

"Y'know, I learned a lot from her," said Edgar, watching Lily from the two-way wall. After her words, he had been curious to know her reaction when she was alone and had quickly went to the Observation Room.

Moody snorted, "You learned your own cousin's address. What progress."

Edgar scowled and rolled his eyes. "I learned that she cared enough to remember. And that you've hit her before."

Moody jumped. "Only when she back talked," he growled. "A bop on the head never did anyone harm."

"Would you want to join someone who smacked your head? I bet that you're first on her 'To Kill' list, along with that Snape kid."

They looked through the wall at Evans, who had her eyes closed. After a few minutes she murmured just loud enough for the audio spells to pick up, "July 12th. Debbie..."

She finally had a name. Six years with no names and she finally knew one. Deborah Bush. Somehow, the name made everything hurt even worse.

The door creaked open. Lily lifted her head from her chest, awaiting the intruder. Bones had told her that he wouldn't be back until tomorrow and Moody shuffled his feet, unlike this person.

"Hey, Lily," said Snape softly.

Lily quickly froze her face and refused to meet Snape's pleading eyes. It was his fault that her hands were handcuffed tightly behind her back at the moment. It was his fault she was trapped in Order of the Phoenix Headquarters. It was his fault Petunia was going to die.

"I just came to tell you that your sister's safe. Dumbledore put her somewhere in Scotland until this blows over."

"Petunia?" she asked quickly, hardly believing her ears. Maybe her sacrifice wouldn't be for nothing.

"Yes, Petunia Evans. From what Dumbledore-"

"Wait a second; you said his name," stated Lily.

"Pardon?" asked Snape in confusion.

"The Headmaster's name. You've been speaking it for a while, and I hadn't even noticed. If I had been paying attention these past few months I could have found out your little plan sooner," said Lily icily.

Snape took a deep breath and continued where he had left off. "From what Dumbledore said, she hadn't heard from you in six years. Didn't you tell her about Him?"

“I’ve told you about Petunia. She wouldn’t understand. Her greatest fear is someone learning she’s related to a ‘freak’ like me; not that the most evil ‘freak’ of all is after her.” Lily blinked and remembered where she was and who she was talking too. “But maybe you’ve forgotten that since you got all chummy with the Headmaster.”

“I saved you and your sister! You should be thanking me on bended knee,” he whispered harshly.

“Yeah, because I always thank people who ruin my life!” she hissed, unable to keep a blank face around the person who had once been her closest confidante.

“I never heard you complain when the Dark Lord did it!”

“If you dare to even say that, then we have nothing to talk about.” With renewed determination, she tried to separate her mind from her body, but found herself unable to.

“Technically, Occlumency is a form of wandless magic,” said Snape with a condescending smirk.

Lily felt as though her insides had turned to lead. “To think I wasted my time saving your life so many times that I’ve lost count. If I had just left you for the werewolf, I would never have been in the library with Filch, which means I would not be sitting here right now. So, next time, I won’t bother.”

“If they kill you here, there won’t be a next time,” said Snape fiercely.

Lily narrowed her emerald eyes. “You-”

A gruff voice interrupted. “Snape, you know where the door is. Please use it.”

Moody stood behind Snape. The Slytherin whirled around and stalked out, cloak billowing behind him.

“Without your Occlumency, you’ll get real bored in here, real fast. Edgar told me to tell you that, quote, ‘you need only to say that you’d like to talk and I’ll be here in a jiffy’ end quote.”

“You tell Bones that my thoughts provide more intelligent conversation than he ever could,” she hissed, rage still pumping from her row with Snape. However, she immediately regretted her words, for the anger in Moody’s eyes was enough to scare her, which was saying something. Voldemort never showed his anger, so you never were aware of when you were in trouble, but it was always clear where you stood with Moody.

Lily closed her eyes and waited for the sharp blow to her head that always came after one of those angry looks. The longer she waited, the more tense her shoulders became. Finally, with a sinking feeling in her gut, she opened one eye. Instead of seeing, as she’d expected, with a striking hand or a green light, she saw the Auror turning and exiting quickly.

When she was sure he was gone, she relaxed her shoulders with a relieved sigh. With him out of the room, she was able to calm down and let her raging emotions show more plainly on her face. Lily busied herself in learning the art of guarding emotions without magical help. With a little practice, she hoped to pull off complete magicless mind-blocking by the end of the week.

GIVE ME A REVIEW! (I’m like the Cookie Monster, only not) Well, be happy, 'cause I updated soon. The dedication for this chapter is for the aulophobic clarinetist and sHiVeRiNg sMiLe both of whom review a lot more than the rest of you. OH, and why is that only 20 out of 70 people who have this on story alert actually review? Please review!

Dinner with the Order was always interesting. James was seated between Sirius and Kingsley as Emmeline set the bowls of her cooking on the rough wood dining table.

Snape sat at the end of the table, taking small bites and glowering at his fork as though it had done him a great personal wrong. James wondered whether or not he had spoken to Evans yet, but could assume by the way he was stabbing his mashed potatoes that he had, and that it had not gone well.

The other ten or so Order members were spread along the table, engaged in conversations varying from the Stunner to how well the Chudley Cannons would do in the tournament.

Sirius was scooping himself some a large portion of green beans when James's parents walked in with suitcases in tow. James's mum, Denise, swooped over and gave the three present Marauders a kiss on the cheek.

"Oh, boys, we're so sorry that we can't stay for Christmas!" she said.

Sirius grinned reassuringly at her over his shoulder. "Don't be, mum. Just buy extra good presents." James could tell that he was joking, but his mum nodded.

"I did."

"Honey, don't give it away! They'll see in eight days, and not a minute sooner," said James's dad, Harold, gently. "Well boys, we'll be off. Tah," he said, before steering his wife to the door.

"Bye mum! Bye dad!" called Sirius and James as the Order bid farewell.

"Bye Severus," said James's mum, escaping her husband's grasp to stand by Snape. James blinked as she said, "Don't fret. We got you a present, too!" James's mouth dropped open as his mum gave Snape a kiss on the cheek and left with his dad amidst farewells called by the rest of the Order. To his immense surprise, James saw that Snape had flushed beet red and had a light smile on his face. James

wondered suddenly if the Slytherin had parents. He guessed he'd never learn.

After a few minutes and Sirius starting to load up for his second course, Moody and Edgar Bones burst into the room, arguing heatedly.

"Compassion and understanding, that's what she needs," Edgar was saying. "Scaring her will do no good."

Moody's face was dark red. "She's practically a convicted criminal! The Stunner! She'd kill us all if her hands were free," he argued.

"She's in no condition to kill anyone at the moment," interrupted Kingsley calmly.

Moody laughed coldly. "I had her trapped in a corner, with her wandless and out of breath, and she still escaped!"

"So, that's it. You're sour because she got away from you," said Edgar with a sigh.

"No, I just happen to know that she's a murderer, a fact that you seem to be forgetting!" said Moody quickly.

"Did she kill you?" asked Edgar with a raised eyebrow.

"She would have," growled Moody. He grabbed a napkin and used it to pick up a roll, then picked up a goblet of water. "Time to feed the murdering Stunner."

James scowled, but didn't rise when he saw Emmeline stalk over to Moody and say, "Bread and water? Is that all you've been giving her?"

Moody blinked. "What else would I give her?"

"A decent meal," said Edgar. "How's about you let me be in charge of her meals."

Moody shrugged. "Just don't give her a wand," he warned. James rolled his eyes with the rest of the present Order members.'

Edgar loaded a spare plate with a pile of everything as the conversation started up again and cast a spell so both that plate, his plate, and two cups of pumpkin juice to float behind him. "I'm eating with Lily tonight," he said, saluting the Order and exiting.

"Better him than me," said Moody grumpily before pulling up a chair and joining the Order for dinner.

The girl looked up in surprise as Edgar walked in. Without her Occlumency, she couldn't hide her hope when she saw the steaming piles of food on the plates.

Edgar conjured a small table and a chair for himself before going over to free Lily. "You must be starving," he said, bending behind her to take off the handcuffs. "Go ahead. Stand up and stretch."

Lily rose, massaging her wrists. Scars from the burns circled her pale skin and she closed her eyes tightly when she touched a raw burn. Calmly, she leaned back and grabbed her ankles upside down, sighing happily. She stood back up and touched her toes.

"Pull up a chair," Edgar said, sitting down and picking up his fork.

She stayed where she was. "What's the price? A Death Eater name a bite?"

Edgar put down his fork and met her emerald eyes. Though she had no wandless magic now, due to his spell, he still knew that if she wanted to escape, he'd be unconscious and she'd be in Brazil, but she seemed to doubt her abilities at the moment.

"No price," he said lightly, surprising her. "You get food, I either get a silent meal or a nice dinner conversation. Unless, of course, you have deipnophobia, or something."

Edgar looked back to his food, listening intently for her decision. The chair she had been chained to for a week slid across the floor as the Stunner joined him for dinner.

After a minute without hearing anything else, Edgar looked up to see her staring at the food uncertainly. "Is there a problem?" he asked softly.

Her quick blink was the only sign that he had startled her. "No problem," she whispered. She picked up the fork and took a small bite of potato salad. "It's very nice," Lily said, showing a surprising amount of politeness.

"I'll tell Em that you said that. She doesn't get many compliments on her cooking," Edgar said honestly. It was Order protocol to avoid Chef Vance's Turkey Surprise at Thanksgiving.

"Where's Moody?" asked the girl in a would be causal voice had her eyes not flicked to the door as though she expected the paranoid Auror to burst into the room with his wand drawn.

Edgar chose to ignore her obvious nervousness of Alastor and said lightly, "I'm taking over meal duty."

The girl looked as though she couldn't care less about the conversation, but Edgar knew that she was relieved to hear the news.

"Just be glad it was us who caught you and not the Ministry. You'd be dining on Azkaban with a side dish of fear," said Edgar, aiming for a reaction of any kind from the girl. If there was one thing he loathed in a conversation, it was someone withholding their thoughts, which was probably why Dumbledore chose him for the job.

"If it was the Ministry who found me," she said smoothly, "the newspapers would quickly be informed of a break-out."

Edgar forgot for a moment that he was trying to get on her good side. "Have you ever been around a dementor?" he growled, as his memories caused him to see, not the girl, but the cowering prisoners that shied from the deathly creatures. "Those things would make you

such a quivering pile of fear and guilt that you wouldn't be able to remember your own name, much less be able to break out of the most heavily guarded prison in the world."

"You think dementors are going to scare me? Try living in the same house as the Dark Lord!" she gasped and quickly shoved a bite of chicken in her mouth to stop herself from saying more.

However, her words immediately aroused Edgar's interest. He blinked. "I knew that he'd given you the Mark, but I didn't realize you were that close." Lily looked as though she had resolved not to speak another word ever again.

"Where was this house?" he asked casually. Lily stayed silent. "You know, I don't think you'd betray him if you could." She averted her eyes silently, and Edgar knew he was right.

Feeling that the conversation had worn itself out, he changed the subject by saying, "Your sister's an interesting character." Lily didn't seem to trust that it was an honest change in conversation. "I only have a sister, Amelia. She's planning on going into the Wizengamot with Dumbledore later. He's a great fellow."

At this, Lily got a strange look in her eyes but said nothing. "What is it? You don't like Dumbledore?" asked Edgar in confusion. When she didn't answer, he raised an eyebrow, "Why do you have a problem with Dumbledore? Dumbledore's just the nicest man, and the greatest wizard of our time! He's the one who defeated the last Dark wizard and he'll defeat this one too. Dumbledore-" He noticed that she was blinking every time he said the name. "Dumbledore," he tried again. She seemed to almost flinch. "Do I even want to know?" he asked.

"Only the Dark Lord is allowed to say his name," Lily murmured, pushing a scrap of food slowly around her plate.

"Dumbledore!" he said again.

“Stop it!” she hissed, slamming down her fork and then, realizing how openly emotional she was being, took a deep steadying breath and averted her eyes.

“Now you say it: Dum-ble-dore,” he challenged.

Lily looked up, eyes flashing. “He’ll know I said it.”

“Who, Dumbledore?” asked Edgar with a doubtful smile.

“No, the Dark Lord,” she said flatly. “He knows things. His name and the Headmaster’s name are not meant to be spoken aloud. Of all people, you should know that.”

The smile slowly grew on Edgar’s face. “Voldemort!”

Lily’s eyes opened to the size of the rolls on her plate and her mouth hung open. She glanced around quickly, as though expecting to see the man standing in the room that served as her cell. Edgar laughed. “Voldemort, Moldywart, Voldemo-”

Before he could even react, the girl had leapt out her chair, gotten behind him and clapped a hand to his mouth. “Hush!” she hissed in his ear. “If he comes here, we’re all dead.” Edgar froze, glancing at his wand on the table. If she got it in her mind to escape...

However, flight seemed to be the farthest thing from her mind. “Please don’t say those names again,” she whispered, as though ‘names’ was a sordid curse word. Edgar thought she was overreacting. What’s in a name? to quote my favorite wizard. Not even Alastor scares her this much.

The man nodded slowly and she released his mouth and sat back down. Lily calmly picked up her fork and finished off the last few bites of squash and picked off bits of the rolls.

“If you’re finished, we might need to get you set for the night,” said Edgar, masking his worry. She took a swig of pumpkin juice, stood up and carried her chair with one hand to the center of the room. She sat

down, placed her hands behind her back and looked at him expectantly.

Edgar banished the table and bent down to put on the handcuffs. Right before he clicked the lock into place, he asked, "If you thought there was even the slightest chance that you could make it out of here alive, would you try to escape?"

The redhead whispered, "Yes," with such cool certainty that Edgar felt no doubt that she would. The room was silent other than the lock clicking loudly into place.

Edgar left, but went straight to the Observation Room. Inside sat Alastor. "Not in a position to kill anyone at the moment", as Kingsley said. How'd you get her to back off? I thought you were dead for a second there."

"Couldn't you hear what she said?" Edgar asked in confusion. When Alastor shook his head, Edgar said, "Well, she was just trying to get me to shut up. But, afterwards, she told me that if she thought she could escape, she would be out of there in a flash. I think that she thinks that we have more able people here than we do."

"Let's keep it that way," growled Alastor.

Edgar sighed. "It's not just the other people in here that's makes her think she can't escape; it's you. It's my guess that she knows how angry you are that she escaped the first time, and I'll be she thinks you'll kill her the second she puts a toe over the line."

"Good," said Alastor shortly.

"Not good," reprimanded Edgar. "She'll never trust us if she's worried that you'll kill her! We just have find a way to make her not want to escape, and, maybe, then you two can make amends." Alastor just shrugged and returned to his vigil over Lily, but Edgar knew the Alastor was mulling over his words.

What'd'ya say? Please review! Oh, and dedication to the first person who can tell me what deipnophobia means! Just please take a few

seconds to type in 'Update' or 'Never update again' into the review box. Of course, if you'd like to type more, I'd be much obliged. Not to be ostentatious or anything, but I have over 300 reviews! I'm so proud! Please help me reach my goal of 500 for this story by reviewing now.

James yawned and leaned back in his chair, clearly bored, watching his two best friends locked in an intense battle of Wizards' Chess. "Knight to E4," demanded Sirius, blowing a lock of dark hair out of his silver eyes. The knight slid across the squares to Remus's pawn. The pawn burst into a million ivory pieces when the knight drew his sword and sliced him out of the way.

James rolled his shoulders and yawned. "Not that this isn't the most interesting thing to watch, but I'm to try to talk to Evans," he said to his friends, rising from the comfortable armchair.

"Good," said Sirius with a cocky grin. "Now you won't have to watch Moony endure this terrible loss."

"Checkmate," said the werewolf lazily, leaning back in his chair, a glint of laughter in his amber eyes.

Sirius cursed loudly and said, "The terrible loss of one of his limbs!"

Moony, completely ignoring Sirius's anger, waved his wand and restored all the pieces back to normal. "Best five out of nine," challenged Sirius, placing all of his black soldiers on his side.

"Bring it," said Remus, raising his chin up defiantly.

James rolled his eyes and left the hotel's living room, heading up the flights of stairs to Evans's cell. On the way up he ran into Kingsley, who had a towel around his thick neck. "I'm headed off to the weight-lifting room. Would you like to join me?"

"Nah," said James. "I'm going to see Evans."

Kingsley raised an eyebrow, but continued down the stairs. James ran up the last flight and strode to Moody's bedroom. He knocked on the door, but received no answer. He decided to try the Observation Room. Upon entering, he saw Moody sitting in a lounge chair and drinking a cup of steaming coffee. "Have to stay awake," he grunted when he noted James's inquiring look.

“Have you stopped watching her for a minute the entire time she’s been here?” asked James with a roll of his eyes.

“Of course,” said Moody, not catching on to James’s tone. “I leave when either Kingsley or Edgar volunteer to watch her for an hour or so. I know that this weak stuff is just an act. She’ll try to break out any minute now, and I want to be the one to catch her.”

James looked doubtfully through the wall at Evans, who appeared to be sound asleep. “Just wondering, but may I go in? She must get lonely in there,” said James.

Moody shrugged and pointed to a chair in the corner of Lily’s room. “Edgar decided to keep that chair in there. You can sit there if you’d like, but be careful; she’s dangerous.”

Lily blinked, yawned, and opened her eyes fully. Sleeping when tied to a stiff chair was an uncomfortable experience, to say the least.

Suddenly, she noticed a person sitting in the far left corner of the room. Her head snapped to the side to stare into the eyes of James Potter. He was sitting in Bones’s chair, watching her silently.

Though tempted to tell him to get out, Lily decided that ignoring him would be the best tactic to ensure his speedy departure.

She focused on the opposite wall and gazed blankly at the smooth white stone. She kept her ears intently listening for any sound of movement from the Marauder, but his steady breathing was all the evidence that the boy was even in the room.

At least Sev- Snape had talked to her. She found that she preferred his hot anger to this cool silence she was enduring. Though she felt loathing for both boys, the fact that she knew Severus made her more open to expressing her rage at him, while her anger at Potter was something that she couldn’t explain to others.

The feeling of hatred had risen slowly in her during first year, when Potter played a prank on her daily. About halfway through the year, he had discovered the perfect way to annoy her; asking her out. Day

in and day out, he would casually mention sitting together at lunch, or snogging in the broom closet on the third floor. After a day of finding it a bit annoying, Lily began to hex Potter when he'd ask her a question of any kind, even when it would turn out later that his comment was going to have been an innocent homework question or something.

That fact that he was so determined served only to infuriate her more. Right before the summer after first year, Potter had cast the spell that stopped her from breaking school rules. She had, of course, thought that the spell wouldn't affect her at all, what with the name Lily Evans being the epitome of all things anti-rule-breaking.

However, once summer hit, she found herself longing to break a little school rule by flying her broom in the nearby Muggle park around midnight, but no, page 5346, section 4 and paragraph 8 stopped her from even doing that. Of course, for the first month it just served as an annoyance. Once Robin died, however, she thought to herself that if she had just been able to show him a magic trick, he would have waited around the house for just a minute longer.

After already being depressed about the death of her older brother, Lily's life was flipped upside down when Voldemort had Apparated into her yard. The girl had pulled out her wand and tried to hex the man into oblivion, but was stopped from doing that by the book. Potter's spell had casually missed letting her slip through any exceptions or loopholes. Voldemort had quickly killed her parents, knowing that they would have served as only a threat when he was trying to teach her to become the most feared Stunner in the world. Without her wand, she could only stand and watch helplessly as her parents perished.

In a bout of uncontrollable hatred, she had leapt at the Dark Lord with the intent to kill, only to find herself restrained by a burly Death Eater. That's when Petunia had walked outside and screamed. If only the stupid Muggle hadn't screamed! If Petunia had escaped, then Lily would have gladly sacrificed her life instead of working for Voldemort.

She realized that hours had been slipping by as she pondered, and wondered whether or not Potter had left yet. Lily was unable to control her head from swiveling around and looking to where Potter

still sat, motionless, in her cell, with his large hazel eyes glued on her still face.

What annoyed her most was that, somehow, he was able to block her from seeing emotions through his eyes. It couldn't have been Occlumency, for the room was set to block that. Maybe she just wasn't looking hard enough.

She held his gaze for another minute before whispering, "What?"

He jumped and shook his head as though to dislodge burr entangled in that mop he called hair. He blinked and met her eyes. "I just was wondering whether or not you feel guilty- you know, for all the killings," he said, meeting her eyes.

How dare he look upon her like he doubted her Gryffindor heart! Well, if he wanted evil, then that's what he was going to get. "Of course I feel guilty," she sneered in the most sarcastic voice she could muster. She had to tell the truth due to the confines of the lie detectors, but she could only hope that Potter didn't realize that.

He just met her eyes silently. Now this she could handle. Most conversations with the Dark Lord consisted of the follower talking and the master giving an unnervingly flat stare. She had been able to hold his gaze for hours without letting a drop of feeling show through, and if she could do it with Voldemort, then she could definitely do it with some seventh year.

They slowly blinked at each other for what felt like, and probably was, hours. Finally, Potter leaned back in his chair and said, "The weather's really nice today."

Lily held back her surprised blink. Here he was, sitting with the second most feared being in the world and all he could do was comment on the weather! "Remus, Sirius and I are going out to play Quidditch later. Maybe we'll get Sn- Severus to play, seeing as we need more people."

Now, staring contests Lily could handle, but she knew that even if it was Voldemort saying such a ridiculous statement that she would not

be able to hold in her disbelief. She snorted and her eyes twitched in a would-be roll.

“Doesn’t Severus play Quidditch?” asked Potter in surprise.

Lily could not escape the remark from flying out of her lips. “Not since Jessica Fairfield cursed that broom to buck him off,” she said, pursing her dark lips afterwards.

“Then what can we do together?” Potter asked, still in slack jawed amazement.

“Do you practice the Dark Arts?” asked Lily.

Potter looked scandalized. “No!”

“Then you and Snape have nothing in common,” she said.

“Then what does he do for fun?” asked the messy haired boy. He was leaning forward in his chair, as though actually wanting to hear the next words.

Lily sighed. “To Snape, the Dark Arts are the epitome of fun.”

“Do you agree? What do you do for fun?”

Lily cocked her head slightly to one side and met his gaze. “I run.”

“Ah,” he said wisely. “Run, like track, or run, like from Aurors?” he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Lily did not look at his eyes, instead looking straight at the wall above his head. In truth, she ran in her wolf Animagus form when she got the chance, but adding illegal Animagus to her list of crimes would not be wise. Instead, she shrugged.

“Did Robin run track?” asked Potter lazily, but Lily could see the intense curiosity on his face.

Lily froze and made sure her eyes were frozen. “How did you guys learn his name?” she asked in monotone.

“You said his name when you were asleep,” answered Potter, leaning back in the chair and crossing his arms as hazel eyes pierced into her.

“Well,” she said, harnessing her anger and smoothing over her face, “I was just dreaming. I don’t know anyone named Robin.” She was proud of her ability to tell truthful lies. Lily used to know Robin, but his death caused her not to know him anymore.

“Have you ever known anyone named Robin?” he asked.

Lily refused to answer, looking intently at the wall just over Potter’s messy hair.

“I see,” he said softly, and Lily’s eyes narrowed. Sometimes Potter was smarter than he looked. “Well, if Severus doesn’t like Quidditch, and I don’t like the Dark Arts, maybe we can try something else.”

“Like what?” asked Lily, “Baking brownies? And since when have you stopped calling him Snivellus?”

“And since when have you started calling him Snape?” retorted Potter, leaning forward again. “My opinion changed just as quickly as yours did!”

“That’s because he had been lying to me!” she whispered harshly. Realizing what she had just said, Lily faltered, “I mean, he...I—Sev—Snape—He’s no friend of mine,” she concluded.

“I never said he was,” said the boy calmly. “And he’s been hiding stuff from me, too. I didn’t know about his Order membership.”

“He had no obligation to tell you,” Lily hissed, defending the boy who had just become her enemy. “Would you tell Bellatrix Black that you had gotten into the same Defense Against the Dark Arts class that she did?”

Potter blinked. "That's completely—not what I meant. Black is evil," he said.

"From your point of view. Severu—Snape thinks that you and Black are evil," she pointed out.

"See? He agrees with me," said Potter.

Lily sighed and let her eyes flick to the ceiling. "Sirius Black," she murmured with a sigh.

"Oh," said Potter slowly.

Lily, struck with an idea, said, "How about you go ask Snape what he wants to do?"

Potter also looked surprised. "Great idea!" he said before racing out of the room.

"I win," Lily murmured, allowing a smirk to cross her face.

Alastor watched the argument curiously. The Stunner obviously had no fear of Potter or any of the other teens staying with the order, and it showed. With I'm and Edgar, her biting comments were kept at a minimum, and even the slightest display of emotion was a rarity.

The Stunner seemed to display multiple personalities, and Alastor was having trouble keeping track of them all. Which one was the real one, or was there a real one? Maybe her character was as undecided as Tonks' appearance.

He turned back to his silent vigil over the Stunner, determination etched in his gnarled features.

Lord Voldemort paced in one of the back halls of Nighshade Mansion. A small piece of parchment was clasped tightly in his strong, tan fist and he could not help glaring down at Snape's words once more.

Upon finding that the horrible truth had not been a mad hallucination, Voldemort threw the parchment against a green wall. He pulled out

his wand, gave it an irate flick, and watched triumphantly as the pale paper burned, tendrils of black ash overtaking the ghastly words.

He needed to know who, he needed to know how, and he most definitely needed to know why. The first human he had been able to care for, missing.

At first, he had only recruited her because of the rumors of her knack for curses beyond her years. When he had seen how brilliant she truly was, he felt a bond with her. Someone needed to teach her power—she would not be raised as Voldemort himself was, with only a common school education.

Sometimes, she had to be persuaded into taking the right course of action; her annoying bond with that Muggle sister of hers was often the best way. It was because of that filth that he knew Velisna would not stay away for long.

Suddenly, the self-named Dark Lord ran to where he knew his followers were in the banquet hall. “Go now and check on Velisna’s sister!” The Death Eaters looked at him in surprise. One daft fellow dropped his fork. The Dark Lord ignored it and hissed, “Go!” A few followers slinked out of the room, bowing rapidly.

After ten excruciatingly long minutes, they returned. One look in their nervous faces told him all he needed to know.

“Bring me those who were in charge of watching the Muggle,” he hissed softly to the silent room. When no one moved, he clenched his fists. “Now!” As Death Eaters scurried about, he twirled his wand around lean fingers. The unwatchful follower would pay.

Now, to those of you who have not yet reviewed. This is me, begging you to. My only motivation for writing this story is the reviews, so if I do not get 30 (THIRTY) reviews for this chapter, you shall hear from me no more. I will write this story for the amusement of my friends and to sate my own imaginations cravings to be solidified into words. REVIEW! PLEASE!

The chair dug painfully into her back, and she squirmed a bit against it. The number of Christmas carols sung had been increased, and Lily had a feeling that the holiday was coming ever nearer. Her keen ears picked up the sounds of feet approaching her door. Lily sighed and straightened her face as the doorknob twisted open. 'Looks like its time, once again, for Twenty Questions...' she thought, annoyed.

"Lunchtime!" said Bones as he strode jovially into her cell. "We have a special guest today," he mentioned lightly as he levitated in three plates and goblets after conjuring a table. "He'll be up in a second." The door closed behind him due to a command from Bones. His hazel eyes were bright and cheerful, and his slender and commanding presence filled her cell. His assured steps led him to the chair she was tied to.

Bones unlocked Lily's cuffs and she stood unbidden and stretched calmly. He picked up her chair easily with one tan hand and set it by the table he had conjured. As she slinked towards it, he pulled it out like a gentleman. Lily resisted the roll of her eyes and sat down lightly on the edge.

The lunch on her plate consisted of a small salad, a cheeseburger, creamed corn, and various other vegetables. The gentle aroma of the food rose to the girl's nose, but she ignored it as her mind, once again, set into Velisna mode. Lily let her emerald eyes drift slowly to the white door of her cell. Maybe she could bust out when the 'guest' tried to get in. She would, of course, have to get by Bones, but she might be able to trick him into thinking she was just-

"Get that look out of your eyes," said Edgar sharply, startling her out of her planning. "It took him forever to get out of work long enough to see you."

Suspicion flooded Lily's veins and fear clouded her brain. The guest was someone she hadn't seen here yet? The only other Order member she knew of was...

"Sorry I'm late, Edgar. Had to conjure up a glass of lemonade from the castle," said the Headmaster, taking off his tall wizard hat and bending down so he could enter the room. Trapped in a room with an

Auror and Albus Dumbledore, she thought wearily. This is as bad as being trapped in a house with Voldemort and fifty followers. Lily felt like she attracted these kinds of shaky situations.

“That’s alright, Albus. You know Lily Evans, correct?” he said, gesturing at the seemingly calm, but really fuming redhead. Her snake tattoo raced across her hand, moving so fast that it was merely a green blur.

The silver stars on Dumbledore’s royal blue robe glistened as the bearded man sat down by the table, setting down his aforementioned glass of lemonade. China blue eyes sparkled disarmingly at Lily. At first glance, Voldemort didn’t look like much of a threat either.

Bones walked to his own chair, which was across from Lily, and sat down. “Nobody saw you come here, did they?” he asked Dumbledore.

“Minerva watched out to make sure no one else was near. This part of the hill is normally quite empty. Once this hotel went out of business, all of the other shops moved nearer to the city.” Dumbledore took a lazy drink of the glass. Despite all tales she had heard of his strength, his hands were looking wrinkled and weak. “I hear you’ve been giving Alastor a run for his money in your avoidance of questions,” said Dumbledore amiably to Lily, taking a bite of a potato wedge. This was a man you couldn’t let your guard down near, Lily reminded herself. His innocent baby blues would lull you into a false sense of security, and then he was in your mind, according to the Dark Lord, at least.

“If you tell us all you know, we can stop him,” said Dumbledore calmly. Lily kept her face as calm as she could, keeping her emotions locked firmly behind her emerald eyes. “You don’t really want him to kill all the Muggles, do you?” asked the old man, obviously not anticipating a reply.

Why was he playing these games? He held her sister; the ace. What was the point of acting like she had a choice?

“Go ahead and eat, Lily,” said Bones, causing Lily to blink in surprise. She picked up her fork and gazed uncertainly at the food, worried for

the first time about a slip of Veritiserum in her meal. According to all of her training, this was the time she was supposed to concoct a brilliant escape plan, but staring at Edgar Bones, one of the top Aurors, and being aware of Dumbledore's presence at her side, not a single stroke of genius came to her.

Edgar sighed. "We've been over this. There's nothing in that food other than some bad cooking and a dash of flavor."

Lily raised an eyebrow at him (the one Dumbledore couldn't see) and set her fork firmly on the table.

"Now really, Lily," said Bones, shaking his head.

"If she's not hungry, we can't make her eat," said Dumbledore lightly. That was just like the Headmaster; trying to make her think she was wrong.

As desperately as wanted to talk, she refused to. It wasn't just her intense training that held her tongue; fear stopped all sound but the quick beating of her heart.

"So, Edgar, what was this sweet you were telling me about? She... Her... something like that," said Dumbledore amiably, digging into his food.

"Hershey's," offered Edgar. As the two Order members began conversing about Muggle candies, Lily took deep breaths. She knew the location of her two greatest threats, and Moody was sure to be lurking nearby. If she ran now, her odds were best; no one could pop up and surprise her later. But would she be able to make it out the doors? No matter which side she was on, she was going to be loyal. Even if she escaped, Dumbledore wouldn't kill Petunia (she hoped), so her goal would be complete. If Moody, Bones, Dumbledore or some other Light wizard killed her before she escaped, at least she would not have to betray Voldemort; the current holder of her loyalty. The Dark Lord was the cause of all of her misery, but becoming a turncoat was not a Gryffindoric quality. If she was going down, she'd do it on her own terms, and this was her only chance to do that.

Slowly, Lily inched her chair backwards, masking it by eyeing her food with a falsely frightened look. She rolled her shoulders in the week-old robe and wiggled her toes in her black tennis shoes.

“...Actually, I’ve always thought that Skittles and M&Ms looked to alike to be a coincidence,” Bones was saying, focused on Dumbledore’s face.

Lily took a deep breath and slinked out of her chair, covering the length of the floor with her long, low steps.

When she was mere feet away from the door, a bright pink spell hit the knob. Recognizing it for the powerful Locking Charm that it was, Lily froze.

“Sit down,” ordered Dumbledore’s calm voice from behind her.

Lily hadn’t been trained for nothing. Using her pent up energy from the past week as power, Lily kicked the door with all her might. As she had expected, it was protected against magic, but not pure strength. It flew from its hinge and Lily leapt out of the opening and ducked a spell that flew her way.

“I told you, Edgar!” growled a gruff voice from behind her as Lily rounded the corner before they could blink. Just as she had thought; Moody had been close. Now there were no powerful surprises before her. She leapt down the stairs three at a time, not daring to look back. The fact that it was a spiraling staircase saved her; the spells from her opponents were far away.

There was a little loft that could only be seen when walking down the stairs, located in the wall above the foot of the stairs. Lily guessed that it was inaccessible to humans without a ladder or broom, so she turned into her Animagus and leapt onto the ledge. She turned back into a human and used her cloak to help her blend with the shadows. The three men raced right under her, not even considering that she could have made the jump.

Lily’s eyes widened as it sunk in. She had escaped the room. Looking down at the scars on her newly unchained hands, she knew she

wouldn't go back alive. Then, it hit her. Not in the room.... She could do wandless magic!

A small fire lit in her pale hand, chasing away the oppressive shadows. Lily morphed her ears back to those of a wolf's and listened for her enemies. The closest sound of breathing was... in the loft.

Lily increased the fire in her hands and its soft orange light lit upon Remus Lupin, who was sitting in a meditative pose, watching her through amber eyes.

She pushed out her hand to cast a wandless spell, but halted when he murmured, "Don't worry."

Lily raised an eyebrow. He kept her gaze without apparent fear of her reputation. The years of school must have made him think that she wouldn't kill him. As bad as it was for her own future, she had to admit that it was true. She hated killing, and would not hurt Lupin any more than she had to. "I say that if you can get out of here, then you're free to go. You won't go back to Voldemort even if you did get escape, so I won't stop you," he informed her.

Meeting his eyes, she saw that there were no lies hidden within. Deciding to ignore his presence for a moment, Lily slinked to the edge of the room and peered at the staircase. "I'm going now. If I hear one noise out of you..." she murmured, leaving the implications to hang in the thick air.

"Not a word," he said calmly. "Oh, and congratulations on the Animagus," Lupin said as he closed his eyes again.

Lily jumped down, landing nimbly on all fours and ran back up the stairs to enter a long corridor. There! A window rested at the end of the hall. She began running towards it, but heard footsteps coming up the stairs. She decided to go up another level so as to avoid the oncoming person.

Once up the stairs, Lily nearly ran into a tall black man who she recognized to be Kingsley Shacklebolt. He pulled out his wand, but Lily was quicker. She thrust out a hand, causing Shacklebolt cover

his eyes to shield himself from the blinding flash of white light. She grabbed the wand from his limp grasp and Stunned him. The Auror collapsed back, head softly falling on the carpet the covered the stairs. The rest of his body hit the hard wood that floored the halls.

Lily turned to face the wandpoints of Black and Potter, who had crept up behind her. With a snarl, She Stunned Black quickly and pushed Potter against the wall with a blast of pure wandless magic.

The girl raced down the hall to the window, morphed into her Animagus and leapt out of the window, ignoring the slices of shattered glass. That's when about three Stunning spells hit her with their blood red light.

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James stared at his own wand, and then turned to Moody, Emmeline Vance and Sturgis Podmore in surprise. Simultaneously, they rushed to look out the window at Lily Evans, who was laying brokenly four floors below.

If I may draw your attention to the line about Moody Stunning her. Eariler, it was said that she thought that Moody would kill her if she tried to escape. She was wrong. This shows you something about Moody. His bark is worse than his bite, but his bite is still quite formidable. PLEASE REVIEW! Oh, and I need, once again, 30. No, I won't not ever update, but I won't update for a month unless I get all 30 of them! C'mon, gimme some predictions!

Pain. That was the first thing Lily registered when she regained consciousness. Soft sheets engulfed her battered body. It was just a really long dream, she told herself, not daring to open her eyes. The obvious answer was that she had just endured another intense training session, and someone would be in soon with an illegal potion to make her feel completely like new.

She shifted an inch in her bed for comfort, but found such searing pain rushing through her body that her eyes shot open, though her vision was clouded with the pain. All she saw was black and white. This was worse than nearly everything she had been through (other than the Cruciartus, but even that was just temporary).

“You are extremely lucky to have lived, Miss Evans,” said a calm voice from beside her. “If you hadn’t been unconscious when you hit the ground, we wouldn’t be conversing now.”

That shot the dream theory right out the window. Slowly, the room came into focus. The white stone walls were gone, replaced with solid concrete. Maybe they had finally decided to take her as a serious threat. Who knows? Maybe they would take Moody’s advice on the methods that should be used to get information out of her. Before, it had seemed to Lily that the Order had thought that Moody was being paranoid in his avid suspicion of her, but she knew now that she had lived up to being the most capable Stunner in the world. Flicking her eyes to the side, she saw that the door was reinforced steel, probably soaked in defense spells.

She sighed, but immediately gasped in as her chest seemed fire. To her, it seemed like a very focused Cruciartus Curse, but it subsided with her rapid breathing.

“Fine, I admit it!” said Moody’s gruff voice from out of her view. “We underestimated her! But who in their right mind would think that a teenage girl would try to escape a room with the two of you, and have time to, not only become the world’s greatest Stunner, but an Animagus too?” Was it her pain-crazed imagination, or was that admiration in his deep voice?

“You forgot the fact that she’s totally ripped,” said Bones’s voice from her other side.

Moody snorted. “When did she have the time?” he asked in exasperation.

“Well, she won’t tell you,” said Bones. Finally, they get it! she thought triumphantly. I knew that if I avoided their questions long enough that they’d finally give up. “Half of her ribs are broken,” he finished.

“Yes, that would hinder one’s speech,” said the voice which she assumed to be Dumbledore’s lightly. “Well, Miss Evans, we just wanted to inform you when you awoke that giving you a healing potion is out of the question; if you were at full health we wouldn’t be able to keep you from trying to run again, despite all of the enhancements made to your room.” Lily would have nodded mockingly if her fear of the pain wasn’t so great.

“Who knows?” said Bones. “Maybe someday you’ll willingly spy on Voldemort for us.” Lily tried to sit up at that moment, but the combined pain and panic caused unconsciousness to overtake her senses again.

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“Mum won’t mind if I stay with you a few days. Pick me up by Floo at 3:00 on the 22nd if you can! Love, Nymphadora Tonks,” finished Sirius, folding up the letter and setting it on the coffee table.

“We should go get her. It must be near three already,” said Remus. It was at that moment that the clock struck. One... two... three...four!

Sirius growled a very colorful swearword and leapt to his feet. The Marauders raced to the fireplace in the hotel kitchen and grabbed a handful of dull Floo powder.

“3712 Leather Lane!” said each boy as they entered the emerald flames. Like Evans’s eyes, thought James suddenly. He ignored the

thought as he spun around in the fire, traveling rapidly to the Muggle neighborhood.

James fell onto Sirius, who was staring up at Tonks in fear. Her hair was stormy gray and her eyes were the bright, intense yellow of lightening. "You're late."

Remus fell out of the fireplace on top of James, who was on top of Sirius, and the three heads all looked guiltily up at the young girl. "Sorry, Nymphie," said James. "We just got your letter..." he trailed off.

"I wouldn't argue," said Ted Tonks, Nymphie's father, with a grin. "She's been stalking around the house, getting all worked up because you weren't coming... and you gave her a whole hour to get mad."

The Metamorphmagus picked up three water balloons from a leather chair with a wild grin on her face and a gleam in her eyes. Sirius groaned. "Not my hair," he whimpered.

"You'll hair'll be first," Tonks growled.

"Run!" yelled Sirius, shaking James and Remus off his back. The three boys ran through the house, before breaking outside.

Sirius ducked a big red balloon and laughed. "You missed, Nymphie!" The next balloon burst right on his head. "I'm hit!" he said dramatically. "Save yourselves!"

James and Remus exchanged a glance, looked at the high fence that blocked the Muggles' view of what happened in Tonks's yard, and pulled out their wands. "I'll get Nymphie," said James softly.

Tonks squeaked and ran to the back yard. James gave chase as Remus sent a jet of freezing water at Sirius. The girl in front of him was fast; very fast. She looked over her shoulder and lobbed her last water balloon over her shoulder at him. It smacked him square in the chest. As James began contemplating nominating her for Seeker once he had graduated, she stumbled over a Muggle water hose.

James shot a blast of water at her, but Tonks rolled on the coarse grass and grabbed the end of the hose. The force of the blast of water made James drop his wand. "It's cold out here, and that's not helping," he growled, picking up his wand. "You're in for it."

The ensuing water fight was grand enough that it remained in the Marauders' memories forever. Finally, the freezing, drenched quartet retreated indoors and collapsed by the roaring fire.

Andromeda Tonks, Tonks's mum, passed around mugs of hot cocoa. "Thanks mum," said Tonks, taking a sip of the scalding drink.

"Wands," said Andromeda, holding out her hand. Once she had all of the Marauders' wands firmly in her hand, she said, "You can dry off the old-fashioned way."

Tonks sighed and looked into the fire. The crackling flames reflected off of her eyes. "I wish Lily could hang with us. She's having Winter Break with Voldemort."

James flushed. "If you're going to spend Christmas with the Order, then you need to know something about Lily Evans," he said.

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Severus, for the first time, wondered if he had made a mistake in turning Lily in. To Severus, finding a place where he could help was the best thing that happened to him. From the Snape House, to Nightshade Manor, to the evil infested Slytherin House, this hotel that served as Order Headquarters was the only place where Severus could actually help someone with no reward in mind, but Lily seemed not to feel the same.

Surely Lily could see how great of an opportunity this was! Not only did they offer escape from the Dark Lord, but also letting her aid in his downfall. They gave her the chance for revenge against her parents' murderer, the man who had forced her to become a killer too. If it had been him, Severus would have given Dumbledore every drop of information he had, not even contemplated escape.

She had been so anxious to escape that she had tried to leave a room with Bones, Dumbledore and Moody watching her. So anxious was she to get back to get back to a man who would kill her as soon as look at her that she nearly died in the attempt.

Knocking sounded on the door to Severus's room. He dragged himself off the top of the bed covers and opened the door.

"Coming down for dinner?" asked Emmeline Vance kindly. Her abundant hair was short and curly, bound in a low ponytail over her sapphire blue robes.

Severus shrugged and slightly nodded his consent. "I'll be right down," he said, looking away uncomfortably.

"Oh good! I just made some Shepard's pie, and knew it was your favorite," Vance said, a bright smile lighting her slim face.

Severus smiled tightly. "Thank you."

"See you in a minute, then," the woman said. Severus closed the door and walked over to the light wood dresser. He stared at his pallid reflection in the small mirror. Picking up a small black comb, he ran it through his black hair. Though certain of his classmates insulted his hair, Severus liked his hair because it was just one more thing to separate him from his late brunette father. The comb slid easily through the long curtains of hair, and Severus realized that his hair was getting too long. Instead of cutting it, which would have been disastrous, Severus conjured a small black hair bow and tied it in a low ponytail. He straightened his black robes and turned to the door.

His long cloak hit a lamp and it nearly fell, but the lamp caught itself. A panel on the wall slid open to reveal a tall mirror that was engraved beautifully. He stepped towards warily. He halted in front of it, staring into his own black eyes.

Suddenly, as he shifted to face the mirror, the image changed. He saw himself standing with Lily, laughing and grinning. This was not the only surprise. Both of them were tanned and the Dark Mark was

nowhere to be seen on his bare arm. Severus gazed at it longingly for what seemed a mere second, then shook his head and left the room at a brisk walk, eager to leave behind the future that could never be.

His room was safely on the second floor; apparently they did not want him near Lily. The clatter of silverware on dishes informed him that dinner had begun. Maybe he had stared at the mirror longer than he had thought.

The teen swooped into the kitchen silently, headed for his normal chair at the end. "Hello Severus," said Emmeline Vance amiably.

Severus glanced over at her and softly said, "Hello," though still shaken by the mirror.

"Ah, hello Mr. Snape! Come sit here and try the creamed spinach, it really is delicious," Dumbledore said, gesturing to the last seat of the clumped Order.

Severus sat down quickly, aware of Moody's suspicious presense across the table.

"What's he doing here?" asked a voice from down the table. Severus looked up sharply and stared at Lily's Metamorphmagus friend, who was staring at him with wide amber eyes.

"He's in the Order too," muttered Potter. Severus shoveled some Shepard's pie onto his plate and ate quickly, anxious to get back to his nice quiet room.

"Who else is here?" asked Tonks with a laugh. "Malfoy?"

Severus growled under her breath, making sure that Dumbledore couldn't hear it. Lucius was always the most supportive of Muggle torturing of all the Death Eaters. He also happened to be engaged to the beautiful Narcissa... not that Severus cared, of course.

"Nope, he's the only Slytherin here," said Black calmly, moving his head so the small bell on his Father Christmas hat jangled.

Dumbledore looked over at Black and said reprimandingly, “Referring to someone by their House is not fair. You all go to Hogwarts.”

“But Slytherins are evil gits,” said Black gruffly. Dumbledore apparently didn’t hear him, and Severus ignored Black and ate his last of food.

Severus rose. "I'll retire early tonight," he announced to anyone who cared.

"I should be going up, too," said Moody quickly, levitating up plate and glass and limping to the stairs.

Severus and Moody walked up the stairs together, neither speaking. Severus knew that the only reason Moody had left the table was so that he could make sure Severus didn't go break Lily out or something.

“Night, Snape,” grunted Moody, leaving Severus at the second floor. Severus watched the Auror limp quickly up the stairs with narrowed eyes. If he had known Moody was going to be Lily’s guardian, Severus would never have turned her in.

Pushing those thoughts out of his head, Severus entered his room and cast one last glance at the strange mirror before going to sleep.

[illegible]

not wasting my time looking up again.) She said that my begging for reviews was 'disgusting'. (which is almost as funny as if you had said 'icky'). But that got me thinking. How many less people will review if I don't beg and/or threaten? ... Well, only one way to find out. If I get equal or more, I won't beg any longer and the 'disgusting' reviewer can strut away feeling all proud. L. Or, if I get a little less, I'll just politely ask for reviews at the end. If the amount of reviews I get for this chapter is SIGNIFIGANTLY lower, then I can threaten with the consistency of a drug lord/ Voldemort. Then, t hat reviewer can go do

something that I would rather not post of fanfiction for fear of massive repercussions.

Alastor sat in the Observation Room, watching the Stunner sleep. Her bed faced him so that he could be sure that she wasn't just faking the injuries. Most people hit with four Stunning spells would be dead, but the Stunner had a strong endurance. Instead of normal meals, the kitchen had supplied different types of soup for the injured girl.

The Auror leaned back in his chair, keeping both eyes locked on the complex creature. Nearly every Death Eater they had ever caught spilled information in a flood, telling everything from other Death Eater names to the shop that they ordered their official robes from. Of course, when dealing with Death Eaters, the information would vary from one to the other. Each would claim to never have done anything wrong, while the others would tell tale after tale of what that person had done.

The Stunner tried to roll to one side in her sleep, but she let out a whimper and her shockingly emerald eyes flashed open.

Alastor watched her take deep, steady breaths, flinching almost imperceptibly with each movement of her chest.

Despite himself, Alastor was impressed. His pupils at the Auror Academy had been trained not to show pain, but when the time came, few could keep their feelings in check. This girl, not yet graduated from Hogwarts, could ignore pain with the best of them. He could guess that, though Voldemort inflicted much pain, the Dark Lord did not respect those who showed it. From his limited experience with Voldemort, showing pain only caused more to be dealt. If the pain was not openly acknowledged, men like Voldemort lost interest.

Evans would make an amazing Auror... if she wasn't already completely devoted to Lord Voldemort. They couldn't trust her. Alastor watched the eerie Mark of Salazar trail down her hand lazily, entwining between her long, slim fingers. The Stunner opened one eye and sent an emerald glare down at the tattoo on her hand. The faintest growl was picked up by the auditory sensors and, suddenly, a dark layer of red fur covered the tattoo. The girl let a small smile light her dark lips as she drifted into sleep.

Then again, Alastor thought, maybe she's not as devoted as she acts.

“Professor? May I have a word?” Severus asked his reflection in the normal mirror. “No, that won’t work. Erm, professor, I found something in my room. No!” he put a hand to his head and walked back over to the strange mirror and sat on the floor in front of it. Inside, he and Lily were laughing and chatting amiably. Severus smiled tightly when he saw the wedding band on his reflection’s hand. Instinctively, he knew that his wife in this alternate future was Narcissa Black, though not a strand of her white-blond hair showed in the mirror.

“No. Go away!” Severus said sharply, keeping his eyes on the mirror. The friends in the mirror kept laughing, unaware of Severus’s annoyance.

“You know,” came another voice, “staring at a mirror doesn’t make the reflection any better.”

“What do you want?” he hissed venomously, glaring at the two Marauders.

“Actually,” said Potter, stepping in front of Black, “we came to ask you some questions about Evans.”

Severus raised an eyebrow. "You may ask, but I might not answer. Um, let's take this elsewhere, shall we?"

Potter just walked farther in. "Nice room," he commented. "Interesting mirror."

Severus quickly started for the door. "Let's go."

He heard an amazed gasp from behind him and groaned.

"Snape? Does this tell the future?" asked Potter from behind him.

Severus turned to see Potter staring dumbstruck at the mirror. "That depends. What do you see?"

"Evans and I married."

"Then no, it doesn't," said Severus curtly. "It's just your dreams. Now, I believe you had some real questions for me?" The other boy just stared stupidly at his reflection.

"Shove over, Prongs. I want to see." Black pushed Potter sideways and took his place before the mirror. His face hardened and he smiled coldly. "It figures. Of all my dreams, this is the strongest."

"What do you see?" Potter asked curiously.

"I'll tell you later," he muttered, casting a wary glance at Severus.

"Actually, I was on my way to tell Dumbledore about it. Would, uh, you like to join me?" Severus asked. Anything to get them away from his mirror.

Black gazed a moment longer, then turned stonily to the door. Severus sighed and said, "I guess Potter's not coming."

Black turned back, let out a growl of frustration and went back into the room. The only Gryffindor Black grabbed Potter by the arm and pulled him forcibly away from the enchanted mirror.

Tonks straightened indignantly in her chair. "I came up here to see you and now you're just going to ignore?" She remembered her promise not to anger Lily, but if Lily was going to get mad, then Tonks could too, by Merlin!

“I find out that my best friend is some bloody murderer who works with a psychopath and what does stupid Tonks do? I go to see her, to see if she’s okay,” Lily’s head remained turned stubbornly to the side. “Well, I guess I shouldn’t have worried since you apparently have no heart!”

Tonks stood up, knocking over the chair, and raced out of the room, tears burning her eyes, which had turned back in her rage.

As she turned to head down the corridor, she nearly ran into Moody. “I promise I’ll be quiet,” he mimicked.

“Well... well... who cares if she gets hurt! She’s the Stunner! I thought well, maybe it wasn’t true and she was still just Lily, but, no, she’s a mean, heartless murderer who was only friends with me so that she could kill me!”

From inside the room, they heard a blood-curdling scream.

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Lily could not believe it! She was being forced to compete in a one-sided conversation with her rex-friend! The girl had the nerve to tell Lily that she had no feelings. Lily wasn't the one who had been yelling. The fact that she couldn't yell had nothing to do with it! It was the thought that mattered. Now that Tonks had finally stormed out, her indignant anger, burning rage, the grief that she felt at being captured and recaptured, the betrayal of her friends and the physical pain that engulfed caused her energies to gather. She took a large breath in her battered lungs and let out a scream.

Lily tried to rise from the bed, to go and give Tonks a piece of her mind or fist, then fell back to the bed. The protests of her broken body won over those of her breaking mind.

She attempted to simply slide off the bed. Each muscle pulled back as she pushed it sideways, but she was able to inch sideways. Annoyed by her slow progress, she threw the left side of her body over the right, rolling, and rolled right off the edge of the bed. The

pale wood hit hard on every bruised and broken bone and, once again, unconsciousness consumed her.

Alastor watched as the Stunner rolled off the edge of the bed, slipping between the sheets and straight to the floor.

He left Tonks to stare at the unconsciousness Stunner and strolled to get Kingsley Shacklebolt. "Hello," he grunted as he entered Kingsley's room across the hall.

The other Auror, who was busy doing sit-ups on the floor, sat up and said, "Hello, Alastor." He rose and rolled her shoulders. The sound of cracking tendons filled the room. "What's up?"

"The Stunner fell off her bed. Rolled off, to be exact." Kingsley immediately walked past Alastor to get across the hall, and Alastor trailed closely behind.

When they entered, Tonks was still frozen, staring at her with a look of shock. Kingsley looked at her closely. "Out cold," he decreed.

They could not simply levitate her, as the uneven balance of air could snap something, so the two had to lift her themselves.

Blood red hair covered her white face and her body was completely collapsed. "I'll take heads," Alastor said.

He knelt down and put his hands between her robes and the cold floor, down the small of her back. Kingsley supported the rest. "Ready?" Alastor asked.

"Three, two, one. Lift!" Kingsley said. Her head dangled as they lifted her, so Alastor stopped slightly and set it on his shoulder.

"Let me get the sheets," said a girl's voice. Tonks walked over and pulled the sheets and comforter back from the base sheet. Kingsley and Alastor set the girl onto the soft sheets. Alastor put her head onto the pillow.

Tonks covered her up with the beige sheets and the floral comforter tenderly. “Who cares if she gets hurt?” Alastor asked Tonks, quoting her previous words. “Not us, that’s for sure.”

She scowled at his sarcasm and ushered them out of the room, forgetting about her previous anger.

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“The Mirror of Erised,” said Dumbledore in amazement. James glanced into it once more. He and Lily were sitting together, laughing and talking. James knew that the wedding bands on their hands meant that they were married. How? Well, it was his deepest wish. Despite what Snape had said, James would do anything to make sure the future in the mirror came true.

Dumbledore looked into it from over James's head. His head cocked and his eyes softened. "Wha-" began Sirius, but halted. He asked a different question. "How did this get here?"

“You see,” said the professor, “we are not the first wizards to use this hotel as a base. This used to be the hideout of the sMugglers, and they kept their wizard and muggle prizes stored. Most of them were taken away when we discovered this place, but I guess we missed a few. I’ll have this one transported to my Gringotts vault immediately. Thank you for telling me.”

The four boys nodded. "You all need to clear out for a while. Severus, I'll be finished before tonight, so you won't need a different room."

Someone grabbed his shoulder and he was steered to the door along with Remus. "Let's go, guys," said Sirius as he pushed them along. Snape followed close behind.

Once they were out the door and it was closed tightly behind them, Snape went down the corridor and Sirius began to push them down the other way.

“Bye Snape!” called Remus over his shoulder.

James turned to see the Slytherin freeze halfway down the hall. "Goodbye, Lupin," said the halting voice.

Sirius pulled his two marauding friends to the hallway that contained their three rooms, along with Sturgis Podmore's and Edgar Bones's.

Soon they were all seated in various locations around Remus's room. "So..." said James nonchalantly. "What'd you guys see in the mirror?"

"A cure for lycanthropy," said Remus readily with a weak smile. James nodded solemnly.

Sirius stood abruptly and picked up a glass bauble from the wooden chest in Moony's room. He tossed the sparkling glass up and down in the air, illuminated by the orange Muggle lights.

"What about you, Padfoot?" asked Remus.

Sirius rolled the ball from hand to hand. James realized that however good Sirius was at wresting information from others, he was still ill at ease when sharing it himself. "I was proving my family wrong," he mumbled. Suddenly, he set down the glass and began pacing. "How they were wrong about Voldemort, and Muggles, and purebloods, and Slytherins, and wealth, and about me. I hate that mirror because I know that it will never, ever happen." He averted his gaze for a minute, then strode to the door. "I'm going to go work out."

"Bye," the remaining Marauders said calmly. Sirius did some sort of physical exercise when he was worried about something in his own life. He preferred to sweat his problems away, instead of thinking through them.

James rose from the couch. "I'll go check on Tonks. You coming?" he asked Remus.

"I have a book," said Remus by way of reply, drawing one from his bag. "Let me know when lunch is ready."

As James headed for the stairs that led down, he was hailed from behind. He turned to see Edgar Bones on the bottom stair of those leading up. "Hey James. What are you doing?"

"Hey Edgar. I'm just looking for Tonks. Have you seen her anywhere?" he asked, walking over to him.

"She's up with Lily." Edgar took a step towards his room, then stopped. "Which reminds me... Listen, I need you to answer truthfully. Do you know exactly how close Lily was to Voldemort?"

James raised his eyebrows. "You don't know?" Bones waited for the answer. "He adopted her, according to the girl herself."

"Did she love him like a father?" Bones asked, his hazel eyes intense on James.

"From what we know? No, she was scared of him. Try asking Snipe. He knows her best," James informed him.

"And yet, you're the one who loves her," he murmured.

James cocked his head in thought. "I think Snape loves her too. Not in the way I do, but I honestly doubt that there's a limit to what he would do for her. As much as I h- dislike him, Snape was her closest confidante. Take it up with him."

"I might just do that." The anticipation of breaking a case lit a fire in the Auror's eyes that caused James to realize that Edgar truly loved his job. Edgar Bones left, walking towards quickly to his room.

James walked up the stairs. His legs were so used to the innumerable stairwells in Hogwarts that the mere flight he scaled was nothing.

His feet led him automatically to the white door of the Observation Room. He went to the door next to it and entered. Inside, Tonks was sitting next to Evans's bed, silent and watchful. "Is she awake?" he asked softly as he knelt beside her chair.

“Unconscious,” she informed him.

James straightened and looked down on Evans. Her pale face looked void of blood other than a sizable purple bruise over her temple. “How?”

“Well, er, had an argument,” Tonks said softly.

James brightened. “She can talk!”

“Um, no.” Tonks averted her eyes. “But I could tell she was mad at me, so I kind of yelled at her. Then, I guess she just sort of rolled off the bed. No one was watching, so we don’t know whether it was on purpose or not.”

Knowing the girl, James could guess that it had been. “Are you still mad at her?” he asked, motioning for Tonks to scoot over. She made room for him to perch on the edge of the chair.

“I feel sorry for her, and sad that she was corrupted. But mad? Not really,” Tonks had subdued the color of her hair to a mousy brow. Noting his gaze, she said, “This is my normal hair. I hate it, don’t you? Bright colors are much cooler.” James did not answer. He looked at Evans’s hair, which pooled on her pillow like blood.

“Of course, your favorite color is red, right James?” Tonks remarked with a grin. Seeing his face, she blinked. “Blimey, you really do like her.” James nodded. “Did you get her something for Christmas?”

James felt his jaw drop. “Um...”

“James!” Tonks said with wide eyes. “Christmas is tomorrow! Go get her something! Now!” she said, shoving him. He toppled off the chair and hit the floor with a thud.

He scrambled to his feet and ran to the door. To his eternal embarrassment, he heard Moony’s gravelly laughter echoing in the Observation Room.

As he leapt down the stairs (nearly colliding with the walls at every turn) he wondered where he should go to buy the present. At the bottom of the stairs that led to the second floor, he nearly collided with Sturgis Podmore.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry, old chap?" he asked as James helped steady him.

"I was going Christmas shopping," he said, peering down the hall towards Moony's room.

"As an adult, I can give you official permission to leave," Sturgis said with a wink. "You can go as long as you take Sirius and Remus." He started past him, then said, "Why don't you asked Snape along with you? It'd get him out of the way. He's been wandering around the house aimlessly since Dumbledore kicked him out of his room. And, who knows? He may have gifts to buy."

"Um, okay," James replied uncertainly.

Sturgis tipped his hat and continued on. James went into Remus's room. The lycan was deeply immersed in a thick novel. "Christmas is tomorrow!" he exclaimed as he entered.

Remus looked up. "Don't worry, I bought your present months ago."

"I'm not worried about me. I forgot to get Evans a present!"

"You're buying the 'Stunner' a Christmas present?" he asked as he dog-eared his book and set it into his bag.

"Uh..." James still could not fully grasp that Lily Evans was the Stunner. "I guess so."

An approving smile lit on Remus's face. "I should too. Let's go find Padfoot."

"All right," James said. "Oh, and Sturgis said we should invite-" he trailed off.

"Invite who?" Remus asked as they started down the hallway.

"Er, no one. Never mind," he said, averting his gaze to the blank white walls of the hotel.

[illegible]

Edgar scoured the house, but could find not the slightest trail of his quarry. As he rushed by Kingsley for the umpteenth time, the Auror said, "He's in the kitchen."

Edgar skidded to halt. “Why didn’t you tell me before?”

"It was funny to see you running around."

Edgar did not grace this with an answer. He strolled casually towards the stairs. “Oh, go ahead and run. You know you’re dying to talk to him.”

“It’s not that important,” Edgar said, slowing his pace even more. However, he only made a few steps before swearing loudly and Apparating quickly to the kitchen, ignoring Kingsley’s laughter.

Edgar had seen werewolf transformations, been nearly devoured by a clan of vampires, watched a gargantuan troll pick up a fluffy kitten and give it a sloppy kiss and had met the greatest Stunner in the world, but nothing could have prepared him for what he saw next.

Severus Snape was standing in the center of the kitchen with Emmeline Vance. A long line of white flour ran from his nose to his ear and he was cracking an egg on the edge of a silver bowl.

“Now measure a teaspoon of vanilla and add it in,” said Emmeline.

As Snape picked up the small brown bottle, Edgar said, "Magic would make it a lot easier."

The boy jumped and dropped the bottle. Edgar waved his wand and it halted before hitting the ground and floated back up to settle on the counter.

"It's more fun the Muggle way," Emmeline informed him as Snape poured out the vanilla and added it, his face flushed in embarrassment.

Edgar walked over to stand beside them. "What are you making?"

"A cake for tomorrow morning. Christmas isn't Christmas unless you have cake for breakfast," Emmeline told him as Snape picked up a whisk and began stirring the batter fiercely.

"Amen," Edgar said heartily. "But, I need to take away your helper for a while, okay?"

Snape froze mid-stir. Emmeline didn't notice though, and said, "Just for a while. I was going to get him to help with the Christmas Pudding."

Edgar pried the whisk from Snape's hand, set it gently in the bowl and steered him out of the room. "He'll be back in a jiffy."

"Now listen to me," Edgar said the moment the kitchen door had snapped shut behind them. "Dumbledore thinks you don't know anything else about Lily, but I do. You never actually said you didn't." Edgar steered him into the hotel conference room and said, "So spill."

Snape said nothing, eyes like bottomless holes.

"If we don't get info on her soon, Moody will get to use his tactics for questioning, and I doubt that that's why you brought her here."

"I'm a Slytherin," Snape said softly. "Maybe that's exactly why I turned her in. Maybe I'm glad that you're finally caving."

Edgar leaned against the wall and glowered at the pale boy. "Look, kid, I'm a professional interrogator. Do you honestly think I can't see through that act?"

“What act?” Snape asked, face completely blank.

“Occlumency may work against Voldemort,” Snape blinked sharply at the name, “but the mere fact that you’re using it shows me you’re lying.”

“Maybe I always use Occlumency,” he retorted softly.

“I bet my wand that you weren’t using it in the kitchen, baking a Christmas cake. Oh, and you have some flour right there,” Edgar said, savagely indicating the location on his own face.

Snape wiped at it quickly, brushing the flour from his equally pale face.

“Now, why does Lily have the Mark of Salazar?” Edgar asked.

“I was recruited after she had already gotten it,” Snape told him, standing completely still in the center of the room.

“But you know!” cried Edgar in exasperation.

Snape started for the door. “I have better things to do than listen to your ramblings.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot! The big, bad Slytherin has to go bake a cake! Is there going to be pink icing on it?” Edgar asked with a sardonic laugh. The twisted reason of a teenage Death Eater was going to keep Edgar from making the discovery of the century, and it did not sit well with him.

The Slytherin didn’t stop or retort, but simply slinked out of the room.

Have you wondered why Severus hasn’t tried to break Lily out yet? Well... those of you who have will REALLY like the next chapter where we make some interesting discoveries.

PLEASE REVIEW!

“Can I take some soup to Lily?” asked Severus later that day, looking at a pot of bubbling food on the Muggle stove.

“Go ahead,” Emmeline said, stirring the batter lazily.

Severus grabbed a silver ladle and spooned some soup into the cold bowl he had already set out. He cast a furtive glance at Emmeline (who was still stirring the cake batter) and drew a large blue beaker from his pocket. People always thought that Severus was insane for keeping such a healthy supply of potions (both legal and not) with him at all times. He had only brewed this batch of healing potion over summer break and had only kept it in his suitcase in the fear that teachers searched the dormitories while the students were on vacation.

This particular vial was already a quarter empty. Severus uncorked it and dropped the rest of the potion into the steaming soup. It glowed bright blue for a second, then turned back into its normal opaque white. The soup still smelled of potatoes, but a trained potions detector might have detected the faintest hint of mint, but probably would not have linked it to the healing potion.

The sole purpose of the Rosake Drought, for that was the name of the Dark potion, was to increase the rate of healing tenfold, depending, of course, on the determination of the person in question.

It was painful, as all Dark potions eventually were, and many wizards simply stopped taking it, preferring to have the dull pain of healing than to feel their bones rejoin and grow quickly. He had been slipping it into her food for the past few days, ever since her fall, and knew that the pain of the potion was great, but also knew that she would have died already if not for his subtle administering of the potion.

Years of living with a Death Eater had taught him to recognize all sorts of injuries, and he had been the only one to realize that one of Lily’s right ribs had broken and had been on the verge of busting one of her lungs. Today he would feed her the rest of the potion so that she could finish healing quickly and escape soon. The Order had been stoutly refused to give her a healing potion of any kind; not even pain reducers could be given to her. Even Voldemort eventually gave

healing potions to his followers. From what Severus could tell, Lily would be healthier and happier far away from Europe.

Severus slipped the cork back into the empty bottle and tucked it into his robes, picked up the bowl and carried it to the swinging door. The dull heat of the soup warmed both his pale fingers and his heart. He was helping her.

When he had finally climbed all the stairs, Severus grabbed the bowl in one hand and knocked on the door to Observation Room.

The door creaked open and Kingsley Shacklebolt appeared in the crack. "I brought soup for Lily."

"All right," said Shacklebolt in his deep voice. "I'll unlock it."

Severus waited a second, then walked over and opened the door to her cell. It had been reinforced with hexes and concrete, and the only furnishing was a bed in the center, facing the one-way wall.

The boy walked over to the bed and muttered, "Hey Lily."

The girl looked up at him silently, but her eyes were alive with fury. "I brought you some soup."

"I... don't.... like... soup!" she spat.

"You'll like this soup," Severus told her. Turning from the wall where he knew Shacklebolt was watching, Severus pulled the bottle partway out of his pocket. The corner of Lily's mouth was pulled into a smirk and she let out a heavy sigh. Severus knew that she knew exactly what he meant.

"Can you sit up?" Severus asked.

She didn't even bother to try, shaking her head lightly. Severus put the bowl on the floor, and propped her up and leaned close to her ear. "I added the whole bottle, so it'll hurt worse... but you'll be healed completely in a week," he whispered.

He picked up the soup and spooned a bit to her. She swallowed and opened her mouth again. After ten minutes of careful swallowing, the soup and potion were down Lily's throat.

"It start hurting about-"

Lily's irises began shaking back and forth, her teeth tightly gritted. "Now," finished Severus unnecessarily.

The door burst open and Moody stormed in. He must have been in the Observation Room out of Severus's view. This might complicate things. Shackbolt wouldn't have heard of the Rosake Drought, but Moody... "Is she okay?" he growled, moving close.

"I think so," Severus said, calmly picking up the bowl and soup and putting in his left hand, hoping Moody would take no notice.

Moody examined her face. Her emerald eyes were wide, yet unseeing. Her teeth her gritted, but no sound came through. Suddenly, he straightened and grabbed the bowl from Severus's hand with a speed that seemed impossible with his persistent limp.

He brought it close to his broken nose and took a deep breath. "Potato soup," he identified, starting to draw it away. Then, he froze. "What's this?" He sniffed again. "Mint, in potato soup?"

"Yeah, it adds flavor," Severus said quickly.

Moody looked up with sudden ferocity. "This is Rosake Draught!" He grabbed Severus around the neck with one large hand. "Empty your pockets."

Severus slowly pulled out his wand (which Moody grabbed and pocketed), then pulled out the empty beaker. Moody snatched it and sniffed it. "Yep, it's Rosake Drought, all right. You're coming with me."

The moment they were in the hallway, Moody swore loudly. "Dumbledore's off at Gringotts! I guess I'll just see what Edgar wants to do with you."

Severus was led down a floor, then down the hallway and tossed through an open door. Moody stormed in close behind.

Bones was sitting at the desk in his room, hurriedly making notes on a piece of parchment. At the sound of Severus hitting the carpet, he looked up with startled hazel eyes. "Alastor, what-"

Moody shut Bones's door quickly. "I'm having difficulty thinking of a good punishment and I thought you could help. Ten years in Azkaban is the normal sentence for brewing Dark potions, correct?"

Bones, who had been looking bewildered, suddenly narrowed his eyes. "What did he do?" Bones asked slowly. This seemed to be a different sort of anger from what Severus had seen him display only an hour ago. He seemed almost... scared. "Is Lily still in her cell?"

"Once his potion sets in she won't be," Moody growled. "He's been slipping Rosake Drought into her food!"

Bones stood quickly and walked over to Severus, who was still on the floor. "How long?" Severus stayed silent.

"The beaker was empty," Moody said, "We never should have let him in; he's endangering us all!"

"Dumbledore had promised me that she would be safe," Severus said calmly. Surprised, both Aurors stared down at him. "He broke his promise."

"Poppycock! When has she ever been unprotected here?" Moody asked harshly.

"When she fell out of a four story window! And when four Stunners got her in the back! And not to mention when paranoid Aurors decide to torture her," Severus hissed, rising to his feet and glowering at Moody.

"And she'd be safer with Voldemort?" Moody asked with a scowl.

"She would never ret-" Severus started, and then stopped. This was getting them nowhere. They didn't need to know anything. With luck, the Rosake Drought would heal Lily enough that she'd be able to escape, even if he was in Azkaban.

Bones walked over to Severus and stood between him and Moody. He met his eyes. "Listen to reason. With the side effects of the Rosake Drought being what they are, Lily will be unconscious until midnight! Then, she'll require intense physical training for at least a week before she's back to full health." He was talking calmly, persuasively, but it did nothing to calm Severus.

"She can worry about that once she gets out!" Severus snarled. "I hear there are training facilities in Brazil. At least there she won't be tortured!"

Bones grabbed Severus's shoulders. "She won't be tortured here if you just tell us what we need to know!" he shouted, losing any air of patience he had had before.

"Like what?" Severus asked. "I won't tell you anything that could hurt her." Severus did not know why he was now listening to Bones. Perhaps it was because he realized that she was safer here than anywhere else.

"We're not out to get her! We want her to join the Order as bad you did when you turned her in!" Edgar said, shaking him as though he could make him understand.

"I will answer your questions under one condition," Severus said tightly. "You two have to do everything in your power to help her. Keep her safe and wanted. She will not show it, but being treated like a prisoner who is only here to take up space is doing nothing to help your cause. And," he continued loudly over the protests, "you cannot force her to spy on the Dark Lord for you."

"But-"

"If you need a spy, I'm your Death Eater. Leave her out of it."

Edgar held out his hand. "Deal." Severus shook it firmly, wondering whether he could even trust them. Though he didn't know about Moody, he knew that Bones would keep her safe.

"Please sit down," Bones said, gesturing to a plush leather armchair that sat near the desk. Severus walked over stiffly and perched on the edge. "Alastor, will you lock the door?" The Auror limped over, drew out his wand and flicked at the doorknob; it glowed pink, then settled back to its dull gold. "Now, just tell me anything relevant to our case about Lily."

"Like..."

"Like how many Death Eater names she knows, what Voldemort's plans for her were and, most importantly, about their relationship," said Bones, sitting at his desk and picking up his quill and dipping it into the ink.

Severus sighed and looked towards the door, next to which Moody was standing. He looked back to Bones. "Are you sure all of this will help her?" At their nods, he said, "She probably knows all of the field agents, but only a handful know her."

"Does she know any spies?" Moody asked.

"Me," said Severus with a smirk that showed his sharp canine teeth.

"Anyone else?" Moody growled, obviously trying to keep his temper under control.

"Maybe," replied Severus. "We normally avoid talking about that sort of thing."

"Then what do you talk about?" asked Bones.

"Is that really relevant?" asked Severus, resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

"It actually is," said Bones, setting down his quill and facing Severus. "The more we know about her as a person, the more we can connect with her and find her weaknesses."

Severus narrowed his eyes. Correctly interpreting his look, Bones said, "Only so we can get her on our side, not to harm her."

Severus nodded warily. "Well, we talked about school, her home life before... you know, and the Dark Arts and stuff."

"The Dark Arts?" asked Bones in alarm. Moody grumbled something that sounded suspiciously like, 'I told you so.'

"I mean," said Bones, "we could guess she knew a bit; her ability to create darkness and so forth, but to be a supporter of it?"

Severus glowered at Bones. "The dark, and Dark magic, is simply misunderstood. You fear it because you do not understand it."

"I'm not afraid," snarled Moody. "I loathe the Dark Arts."

"And why is that?" Severus asked with a condescending smirk.

"Because it's dangerous!" Moody growled.

"What magic isn't?" asked Severus quickly. "There is good that come from the Dark Arts."

"Anything obtained by using Darkness cannot be good," said Moody staunchly.

"Indeed?" asked Severus quietly. "Someday, I'll get Lily to prove you wrong."

"Why can't you, if you're so devoted to it?" asked Moody.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "I may know some Dark Arts, but Lily knows it all."

“So Lily’s a Dark adept?” asked Bones, cutting into their argument. His rugged face was dark and he was looking intently at Severus.

“Of course,” replied Severus airily.

Moody swore loudly. “I repeat; when did she have the time?”

“Try six summers cooped up in Death Eater headquarters for a start,” said Severus, examining his short nails.

Bones smiled lightly at Moody. “There’s your answer.” Then, he turned back to Severus. “Do you know anything about Robin?”

“Robin who?” Severus asked with a blink. “Oh, the guy Lily keeps talking about? No clue.” He knew that he was being more open with Bones, and it worried him. Next, he’d be buying the Order sweatshirt or something.

“Now we come to the most important subject,” Bones said. “Exactly what were Lily’s thoughts on Voldemort?”

Severus took a deep breath and told them.

What did you think? Next, we see James attempting to Christmas shop (with little success). The more reviews I get, the more likely I am to update. Please get me up to 500!

“D’you think she’d like this?” asked James, holding up a set of dress robes.

“Uh, no,” said Remus with a smile. Remus had already purchased Lily a gift, had it approved by Sirius, who was the girl expert, and had it wrapped.

James examined the robes. Frothy lace spewed from the neck and sleeves, complementing the pale pink color nicely. Didn’t girls like that sort of thing?

“Can you even imagine Lily in that?” Remus asked with a sigh. “Lily is the... you know, and she doesn’t wear pink.” Seeing James picking up a lacy blue number, he added, “Or lace. Or kittens, like on that stupid mug you wanted before.”

James groaned and put the robes on the nearest rack. “Then how am I supposed to know what to get her?”

“Figure it out,” said Remus. “Listen, you’ll have to shop on your own. We promised to meet Sirius at the Beetle’s Brow in three minutes.”

“But what-” James stopped. Remus was already out of the door, walking down the street.

A store assistant strolled up to him, a fake smile firmly in place. “Do you need any help?” she asked.

“Uh, I’m trying to find something for one of my friends.”

The dark haired woman looked at the row of shelves to his left. “How tall is she?” she asked him.

“Um, five-four, maybe five-five?” James hazarded.

“And complexion?”

“Pale,” James told her firmly.

The woman turned away from the bright colors she had been looking at and moved towards the pastels. "What color hair does she have?"

"Red."

"What shade?" the lady asked as she picked up a set of robes to inspect it. "Carroty, ginger-"

"Red. Like, bloo- brick red," James told her.

The lady dropped the pale orange robes she was holding. "Did you consider jewelry?" she asked.

"Why not robes?" James asked, for a pretty little lavender robe had just caught his eye.

The worker sighed. "Trust me. Now, I'm not really supposed to do this, but..." She snatched a piece of parchment off the counter. "Go here. You'll find what you're looking for." James left Linens Covered With Lace Emporium, then read the slip. 'Finkhousen Jewelers. Go left, then right, then rt. again. Tell them that Jessica Malkins sent you.'

James started left, clutching his cloak tight in the December wind. The shopping plaza (which was in the center of Liverpool) was crowded with wizards doing last minute shopping.

As he strolled along, James wondered if Evans would even care if James got her a present. The more he tried to show that he cared about her, the more she seemed to loathe being near him. There was no way that she could have managed to get anyone anything for Christmas and she probably wouldn't have if she had the chance. Maybe he should just give up... However, the moment he escaped the frosty December air by entering Finkhousen Jewelers, he felt immediately certain that she would like his gift.

The store was small, lit by a magical golden light that seemed to emanate from the ceiling. There was a worker at each counter, and nearly all of them were working with a harassed looking customer.

"May I help you, sir?" asked a man behind the counter.

“Jessica Malkins told me to come here to buy my friend a present...” James said.

“Oh, Jessie sent you?” asked a different worker. The blonde girl motioned James to walk over to her counter. As he did, she said, “She only sends over the really hopel- important ones. Well, what are you looking for? Any ideas?” By her smile, James could tell she knew what his answer would be.

“I have absolutely no clue,” James said with a defeated sigh.

The girl’s smile widened. She seemed to enjoy the promise of a challenge. “Describe her to me. Looks, attitude, everything.”

“Well, she’s short with red hair and green eyes that glisten like emeralds and skin that shines as pale as a full moon. She’s quiet, but spirited and... very beautiful,” he finished uncertainly.

The worker pondered for a minute, tapping her chin with a red and green nail. “Silver or gold?”

James blinked. “Well, we’re both in Gryffindor....”

“You’re from Hogwarts?” the girl asked, delighted. “I just graduated two years ago. I was in Ravenclaw, so... Well, who knows? Maybe I know your girl.”

“Her name’s Lily Evans,” James told her.

“Man, I should have guessed that when you said red hair. She was in my Advanced Ancient Runes class! That was, like, one of her best subjects, I think. Remember that fight you two had by the lake? I was studying for my N.E.W.T.s, but that was great comic relief.” As she spoke, she pulled out a long necklace from her counter. “What about this?”

James stepped forward and looked closely at it. It was a long gold chain that was finer than any he had seen; it seemed thinner than

"All for the small price of murder," Moody muttered from his corner.

Severus bristled. "Lily has never killed anyone!" he spat. "Actually, to my knowledge, she's never used any of the Unforgivable curses."

"But it was her fault that they died," Bones said. "She as good as killed them."

"Lily had to help the Dark Lord," Severus hissed. "We should be glad that he never made her murder."

"But she did-" Bones began.

"And exactly why did she have to help Voldemort?" Moody growled.

"Dumbledore knows that," Severus said. "Why don't you ask him?"

"And say what? That we were interrogating you because you were hiding stuff from him and that you were using Rosake Drought? And-"

"When are you going to tell him then? He'll ask how you learned all of this!" Severus said.

"By that time, Lily will have told us herself," Edgar said confidently.

"Oh really?" Severus drawled with a smirk. "What makes you think that?"

Bones looked annoyed. "Once we know everything about her, we can find the way to draw information out of her."

"Oh please, don't flatter yourself!" Severus whispered harshly. "The more you know about her, the more freaked out she'll get. She won't say a word past, 'What did you just say?' What'll you do when she refuses to talk?"

"My handcuffs will take of that," Moody growled.

Ice raced through Severus's veins, but the fire of fury was in his coal-black eyes. He flicked his eyes back and forth from Moody to Bones in barely restrained panic. "You said- You promised that you wouldn't hurt her!" Already, a plan was formulating in his mind. He would run to Lily's cell and carry her out. Then, they'd Apparate to Brazil!

In a second, he was at the door of Bones's room. Bones and Moody seemed to finally realize what was happening, for Moody stepped in front of the door and Bones jumped to his feet. "Wait!" Bones instructed.

Severus ignored him and stepped close to Moody. If these Aurors were going to go back on their word, Severus would not remain there any longer. Looking into Moody's gnarled face, Severus felt fury like none before. This was the man that was causing Lily pain. Using Lily's advice, he allowed energy to flow through him, then imagined it coming from his fingers. A blast of pure energy slammed into Moody and knocked him against the door, knocking him out.(1)

"Severus!" Bones's sharp command made Severus pause slightly. He could feel his energy waning due to his use of power. "He didn't mean it! Alastor just says stud, you know that! We promised she'd be okay. Stop worrying and trust us. Come back here so we can talk."

Severus cast Moody's prone body a glare, and then walked back over to Bones. "Sit down," Bones said.

"I'd rather not," the Slytherin hissed.

Bones shrugged. "I'm not going to make you. Now, give me the short story. Name one thing that shows their bond. One, then you're free to go."

"He made Lily Secret Keeper of Death Eater headquarters," Severus said impulsively. On seeing Bones's expression, Severus immediately wished he could take the words back.

Bones stood up quickly, blinked, and sat back down. "She's... wait, what?"

Severus shrugged lightly, hoping Bones really hadn't heard.

"Secret Keeper..." muttered Bones. "Perfect!" he exclaimed. "By catching the Stunner, we've basically caught all the Death Eaters!" He stopped with an awed look on his face. "By catching the Stunner, we've basically just caught Voldemort."

Severus began inspecting his short nails. "One problem with that," he said casually to Bones.

Bones seemed too happy to pay attention to Severus. "Eh?"

"There's one little flaw in our thinking," Severus told him. "The Dark Lord made Lily Secret Keeper because she could, I dunno, keep the secret. Despite everything, she won't betray him... to you" Severus quickly amended his statement.

Kingsley Shacklebolt ran into the room. The door slammed open onto Moody's unconscious form, but Shacklebolt barely noticed. "I think she's waking up!" he roared, then paused, looking down at Moody. "What happened to him?"

"No time to explain," Bones said hurriedly. "What do you mean 'waking up'? She should be asleep until midnight! It's only..." he looked at his watch, "nine-thirty!"

"Did you figure out what was wrong with her?" the Auror asked.

Bones shrugged noncommittally, and Severus, despite himself, was grateful. "All I know is that she shouldn't wake up for another three or four hours."

Shacklebolt looked confused. "Well, she opened her eyes a few minutes ago."

Bones jumped to his feet and walked to the door. As he came to Moody's body, he quickly cast a spell that woke him up.

Moody's small black eyes opened wide and he stood up, growling, "Where is he?" He looked fiercely around the room. When he spotted Severs, he took a menacing step forward. "You-"

“We have bigger problems,” Bones said, grabbing the collar of Moody’s robes and dragging him out of the room.

“Severus,” said Shacklebolt as he tried to follow. “Go down to dinner. She’s fine.”

The Slytherin, though seriously doubting his words, obeyed the Auror and headed downstairs.

[illegible]

‘One interesting and generally unknown side effect of the Rosake Drought is that it prevents the drinker from going unconscious. At first, that doesn’t seem too bad. The only people who say that are those who have never tried it. Of course, very few people will ever take the potion: they must be a wizard or witch; they must brew Dark potions; they must have access to a Dark Potion Rehabilitation Clinic; and last but not least, they must have a damn strong pain tolerance.

‘The latter is important because taking Rosake Drought in even the smallest amount is nearly as painful as the Cruciartus Curse, and much more prolonged. To take much of the potion without proper training is to forfeit your sanity.’ —excerpt from *So, You’d Like to Heal Really Quickly* by Catherine Bushe.

[illegible]

Now, Lily had never read *So, You'd Like to Heal Really Quickly*, nor was she particularly inclined to do so, but she could easily have written the aforementioned paragraphs.

After laying on her cell bed, silently screaming in agony for two hours, Lily could also honestly say that having every bone and muscle in her

body aged long enough to heal was the most painful thing she had ever endured.

The pain stopped abruptly, with no warning or signs. Lily gasped and her eyes shot open. She felt energized, better than she had felt in years. Lily stayed still for a minute, taking deep breaths. Then, she sat up straight. Though rejuvenated, her muscles seemed... weak. She hadn't used them for a week or so, but it felt like it had been months.

When no one came into her cell after a few more minutes, Lily swung her legs off the edge of the bed and stood quickly, already taking her first step to the concrete enforced door.

That's when her legs crumpled from underneath her and she collapsed to the concrete floor.

She sat up carefully and looked down at her legs. She tried to lift the left one; it hovered an inch off the ground while her muscles stretched and ached. Every tendon in her body screamed with disuse. Of everything that had happened to her in the past two weeks, this disconcerted her the most; it's one thing to be betrayed by your best friend. It's a whole other to be betrayed by your own body.

Even while the pain from the fall had stopped her from moving, at least she had known that she could have moved, if the pain had gone, but now...

Lily looked down at her legs, which were sprawled on the floor in front of her. The last time she had felt this physically helpless was when Voldemort had killed her parents.

As she sat on the floor, back leaning against the edge of her cell bed, Lily was taken back to her parents' deaths: the smells of the grass and dirt that had surrounded their picnic basket overpowered her nose; she could hear the sounds of the Death Eaters Apparating in; Lily could see the leader take out his wand and, with no apparent regret, murder her father; she could feel the other Death Eater's arms hold her back as the Dark Lord killed her mother.

Seeing that she had caught sight of them, Bones walked forward. He sat down next to her casually, leaning against the bed too. She waited for the reprimanding voice telling her how Severus was in jail now and that she'd be joining him in an hour or two, but it didn't come.

All Bones said was, “Your body has been sped through time. You’ll need intense work-outs every day if you want to regain full use of your muscles.” With that, he put a hand on her shoulder. The action reminded her so much of her that another tear slipped down her face. “We can start in the morning,” he said gently. “Let’s get you back up.”

The Auror put his arm around her waist and lifted her to her feet. Reluctantly, she leaned against him for support. Together, they took a step backwards and sat on the edge of the bed. Lily moved her protesting muscles back onto the base sheet and Bones covered her with the other sheet.

“Goodnight, Lily,” said Edgar as he closed the door.

To the girl's immense astonishment, she heard a gruff voice say, "G'night Evans." As she closed her eyes, she figured that Moody no longer thought of her as just the Stunner.

[illegible]

(1)- He should have turned him into a ferret...

[illegible]

Alright, to ALL OF YOU PEOPLE WHO GOT MAD AT ME: well, fanfiction was messed up and wouldn't let me upload my chapters on here. So, this chapter has been written for a while, but I just wasn't able to update. Not my fault. And last week I was on an island with no computer access. I hopefully will be bale to update soon, but I'm in a camp for the next two weeks.

Okay, well, I just wanted to say THANKS to all my reviewers. I actually wasn't going to show anymore of the interview of Severus by

Edgar and Alastor, but so many reviewers asked for it, I had to. I really didn't think of that as a cliffhanger, but reviewers make the world go round, so I obeyed. The last part of the chapter (starting with the book excerpt) was supposed to be in the next chapter, but I thought I should make this chapter longer, because the next one is like, 10 pages.

CHRISTMAS COMES NEXT CHAPTER!

Oh, and sorry for the longest two weeks in fanfiction history. The last two weeks of Lily's life have been going on for like, 10 chapters.

My new goal for this story is... 1000 reviews by the end of the fic! It's supposed to be around 100 chapters.

REVIEW!

PS- In the next chapter, we have Christmas and either in that chapter or the next we get to meet... Edgar's fiance! She's very anti-Stunner, so she might just make Edgar not trust Lily at all (maybe. I haven't written that far.) What do you think?

OH! And, before I forget, I wanted to ask what you all would do if you were in Severus's situation. You know that you could do something to help your best friend (either with Voldemort or drugs), but they REALLY don't want help and they'll hate you if you turn them in. What would YOU do? (Another of my life question things for my reviewers to chew over)

“Of all the days to sleep in...” said a voice from above him. James groaned and buried himself deeper under the covers. Nice, soft covers...

“James!” shouted Sirius. “Why won’t you get up!” James refused to budge, only snuggling deeper into his plush pillow. “It’s Christmas!”

James’ attention had been seized. He sat up and said, “Wazzat?”

“Christmas morning, idiot,” Sirius said slowly.

“Did you get him up yet?” Remus asked from the doorway. His amber hair had been neatly combed to the side and he was wearing a set of dark red robes.

James rubbed his hazel eyes and shook his head as though to shake away the troubles of the night. “Istmas?” he repeated. “Uhday?”

“Oh well,” Sirius sighed, then turned from his friend and joined Remus at the door. “I guess I’ll just have to take all of his presents. A shame, really, considering we probably got the same stuff...”

James rolled off the bed and said, “I’m up, I’m up!” He shouldered past his two friends to get out of the doorway, not bothering to straighten his bed-tousled hair.

“Uh, James?” Remus said, “The tree’s in the hotel lobby.” James nodded and kept walking. Remus grabbed his arm and pulled him down the stairs. “This way.”

James mumbled, “I knew that,” but his friends paid him no heed.

“I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus,” bellowed Sirius as he went down the stairs behind them, “underneath the mistletoe last night,”.

They reached the bottom of the stairs and turned right, heading towards the sounds of crinkling paper and laughter.

The moment the three boys got into the lobby, they fell ravenously onto the piles that consisted of their gifts.

“Thanks, Padfoot,” said James, ripping away the orange paper to reveal a powder that turned all hair dark pink.

He then opened a book entitled Masterminding Pranks by Frederick Charles Syacuse from Remus, a box of candy each from Tonks, Emmeline, and Edgar. After opening several gifts from people at school, he came to a large box in silver and red wrapping .

The tag said “To: James, From: Mum and Dad.” Seeing that Sirius was already in the process of unwrapping his, James opened it. Under the paper sat a gleaming oak box with the words ‘Deluxe Quidditch Set’.

He glanced at Sirius, who was gazing awestruck at whatever was contained in the box. He tapped the heavy gold padlock with his wand. “Please create password after tone. Beep.”

“Lily Potter,” he said softly.

“Please repeat your password louder.”

He did so and the box opened to reveal a set of Quidditch balls, along with a signed jersey. It was spectacular! The Quaffle was engraved with dragons, the Bludgers gleamed menacingly, the Golden Snitch had ruby lining and the jersey was signed by the Clint Harvise, Wilbourne Wasp Keeper. “Sweet!”

“Closing password accepted,” said the box, nearly snapping shut on his fingers.

“Lily Potter,” he muttered, tapping the box again, and it opened.

“Your mum got me the entire collection of Creature Diaries signed!” cried Remus, as he finished opening his last present.

“I love mum,” said Sirius and James together.

“Did you give Lily her present yet?” Remus asked as he opened Book One: Love’s First Bite.

“It’ll get easier,” Bones told her. “The Drought should help you be as good as new in a few weeks. Knowing you, I’d say you’ll be healed by Thursday.”

She finally asked the question she'd been dying to ask. "Why are you doing this?" she panted.

"If you don't work your legs, everything else will have been useless."

"I mean this," she said, gesturing around the room. While one hand pointed, she slowly grasped the plastic bar with her other hand for support.

"Are you complaining?" growled Moody as he used the chest press. He was watching her progress with a beady eye.

"No!" whispered Lily, trying not to panic. "I was just..." she trailed off. There she went again, sounding weak.

"What kind of people would we be if we let you become paralyzed?" Bones walked I and stood beside her bars. "Now three more..."

Lily complied, but on her second step, her left leg gave out while her right leg was trying to step. The result was that she fell forward. The Auror was there immediately, picking her up and setting her hands on the bars.

"You didn't have to do that," she muttered so that Moody wouldn't hear her.

"Could you have gotten up without me?" Bones looked skeptical.

Lily looked away. "Maybe..."

He snorted. "Try those last two steps again." Lily did so without falling. "You can go sit down now. Kingsley? Can you help her while I go use the leg press?"

Shacklebolt set aside the weights he had been lifting and strolled over. He took Lily's arm and set it over his broad shoulders, and then helped her over to a table, on which four cups of hot chocolate sat.

The girl collapsed into one chair and the Auror pushed it in for her. Lily looked down at the hot chocolate in distaste. All of the powder had settled on the bottom of the porcelain mug and cold dregs of water and milk floated on the top.

She laid her hand against it and closed her eyes. Discreetly, so none of the Aurors could tell, she sent a burst of heat into the mug. It boiled for a few seconds, then was still. The cup was burning her pale hand, but she did not move it. Instead, she sent a burst of cold magic into the cup.

With a hesitant finger, she poked it; the ice stayed firm. She sent in some heat again, trying to make it just warm enough. This time it almost boiled over the top. Now she was getting frustrated. She focused on the cup and thrust magic into that made it swirl violently and mix, then tried to send the tiniest bit of cold into it. Once again, it froze over.

“Most people just use milk,” growled a voice in her ear. Instinctively, she pulled her fingers away from the mug as though it was on fire and looked up at Moody, who scowling down at her.

Shacklebolt looked up. “Just be glad that she didn’t do that to you, you should’ve seen her boiling that thing.”

“What thing?” Lily whispered off-handedly.

Moody leaned forward, grabbed her cup and tipped it upside down. A solid cylinder of frozen chocolate fell out. Shacklebolt’s deep laugh rolled across the table like thunder.

Though Shacklebolt found the situation amusing, Moody was looking furious. Lily cast a furtive glance at Bones, who was completely focused on the leg press. Without Bones to back her up, would Moody simply kill her? Aurors were permitted to use Unforgivable, after all.

“Using Dark magic in Order headquarters...” muttered Moody.

Shacklebolt grinned and poked the ice. "Not very good at it, though, is she?"

"I thought you were an adept," Moody looked the smallest bit less angry.

Lily shrugged, deciding to see where events took it. It's not like she could run away. But what she wouldn't give to make the perfect hor chocolate out of that block of ice. Then Moody wouldn't doubt her abilities...

"What was that?" Moody exclaimed. The ice they had been inspecting suddenly melted into a liquid that spread over the table. Cautiously, Lily reached out and felt it and found that it was not too hot, not too cold. She looked down at her hands in surprise; she didn't know that she could do that. Things were happening now if she simply wished hard enough.

"It looks like your strength isn't the only thing that needs training," Shacklebolt commented. "I guess we'll have to find someone to help her with that,".

With a sinking feeling, Lily saw that he was staring pointedly over her shoulder at Moody. "I can't help her with Dark magic!" he cried, "I think this is a good thing."

"She has Dark magic either way. I think it's best if it's under her control than controlling itself," Shacklebolt reasoned.

"I-"

"Hey Lily," said a voice from the doorway.

They all turned and looked at Severus, who was standing just inside the room. "Alastor," Shacklebolt stood up, "let me show you that Kilenea kick I was talking about earlier."

"But I need to-" but Shacklebolt dragged him away.

Severus sat down next to her and inspected the spilt hot chocolate. "You didn't-" he began. She scowled and his eyes widened. "Why?" She shrugged. "So, how's it going?"

"The training or the imprisonment?" she asked harshly.

"I just attempted to break you out," Severus sniffed. "It almost worked too."

"Yeah, great plan." Sarcasm coated her words.

"There were a few unanticipated complications," Severus shrugged.

"A few?" she repeated incredulously. "I can name ten."

"Oh really?" Severus sneered. "Go ahead."

"Well, first, Rosake Drought is administered drops at a time, not an entire beaker at once. Two, you put in soup. Potato soup. What kind of potato soup smells like mint? Three, it knocked me out of a few hours, which would have given the Order plenty of time to figure out the cause even if you hadn't got caught. Oh yes, and that's four; you got caught. Five, I was in a concrete cell; six, did you even read about the side effects? Apparently, I need a week of training before I'm healed, which brings me to seven; where would I have been healed? Eight, you even managed to mess up my magic! Nine, they have my sister, so if I had escaped she might be dead at this moment. Oh, and ten, you make an awful spy."

"What does ten have to do with anything?" Severus asked dryly.

"When's the last time you contacted Death Eaters?"

"On the last day of school, of course." Severus, despite his calm façade, seemed a little worried.

"Ever think that there'd be a meeting over Christmas? Ever think he'll be wondering where you were?"

"I'll just say I was with you," he said confidently.

“And where was I? He’ll connect you with my kidnapping; it’s elementary,” Lily told him. “I’m talking to a dead man.”

“How will he know that you’ve been kidnapped? Maybe he thought you died or something,” Severus was now sounding decidedly uneasy.

“The Mark would have told him,” Lily said with a shrug. “Let’s face it; if I’m not out of here by the end of Christmas break, you’re dead.”

“That’s a cheery way to wish someone ‘Merry Christmas’,” Bones commented from behind them.

Lily gasped and whirled around. “I-”

“She’s right,” Severus’ voice was casual.

“Who says she won’t be back in school come January?” said Bones lightly.

Both teens raised an eyebrow. “She will?” Severus asked.

“That depends on her,” he said lightly, sitting down across from Lily. She raised her other eyebrow. “Will you answer a few questions?”

“Depends,” she whispered.

“Well, first, what happened to your voice? It’s not because you’re shy, is it?” Bones asked.

Lily pursed her lips. “Silencio gone wrong.”

“Surely Voldemort could fix that,” Bones looked incredulous.

“The Dark Lord liked it better this way,” she muttered. “It’s good for sneaking.”

Bones nodded. “Now, answer me this and I’ll make sure you’re back in school when it starts up. Who is Robin?”

At that moment, there was a commotion outside the door. "Lily!" Potter raced into the room. "I got you a present!"

"Oh, that reminds me why I came over. Here are your other gifts," Bones said, setting a pair of boxes on the table. He stood and leaned into her ear. "We'll continue this later."

The girl looked towards the oncoming trio. They were leaping and hollering like a horde of crazed chimpanzees. "One, two, three!" Potter cried.

"We..." they began, harmonizing the note. "wish you a merry Christmas and a happy... New... Year!"

Lily sat, blinking up at them. First, she gazed at Remus, who was grinning lightly. Then, at Potter, who was grinning like... Potter at Christmastime. Then, she looked at Black, who had a smile as bright as the silver tassels on his Santa hat. She stared at him the longest. There was something about his smile that made her wonder if he was quite sane. "Don't we hate each other?" she whispered to him.

His insane smile widened. "We can't let a little thing like hatred get in our way! Merry Christmas, Lily!"

"Potter paid you to do this, didn't he," Lily sighed.

"How about just opening the presents?" Remus chuckled.

Lily was suddenly uncomfortable. "Don't any of you have presents to open?" She gazed at her pile of presents.

"We already opened ours," Potter told her.

Lily was disconcerted. Normally her pile of gifts numbered one; a gift from Voldemort. Those gifts ranged anything from a potion to an Invisibility cloak. Now she had no clue what to expect. She hadn't a real Christmas since her first year. She looked over the presents carefully. "Open mine first," Remus held out a box. After unwrapping

the paper and opening the box, it was all she could do not to gasp in delight.

“Fudge...”

“I found a little candy shop that makes real fudge,” Remus told her. “Try a piece, it’s delicious.”

Lily reached out and broke off a tiny piece of the white one with red and green specks. She brought it to her red lips and let it sit on her tongue. A cool blast of peppermint hit her senses, accompanied by the smoothness of white chocolate. She closed her eyes, feeling as though that one taste had brought peace to the world.

“They’re a special soothing candy. The one you had was Peppermint Peace,” a voice told her. Lily was still floating on waves of joy. “It’s a great de-stressor.”

Then, the taste was gone and all the harsh memories flooded her mind. “Thanks Remus.”

“You can open mine next, if you’d like,” Severus gestured to a gift that was obviously hand-wrapped by him. Lily carefully sliced through the Spellotape and saw, enclosed, a thick book simply entitled Journal. “Open it,” Severus said softly.

“How?” Lily searched the book. It was enclosed completely with the protective leather, not a single page showing.

“Place your thumb right there,” Severus told her, pointing to a slight indent. She did so and the book glowed black for a second, then returned to dark brown. She opened to the beginning. Pure white parchment with a small brown design in each corner was enclosed in the book. “And,” said Severus, “to close it, put your thumb back on the spot.” Lily sealed it up.

“That’s really cool,” Remus inspected it.

“Thank you,” Lily told Severus.

“Open mine!” Black handed her a box.

Lily opened it cautiously, for Black had given her prank gifts before. “Oh my...” she whispered as she picked up the gift.

“I thought you’d look hot in it,” Black said calmly. It was a flowing green set of dress robes with a black lace trim and a trio of pearls clustered at the lowest point of the plunging neckline. It was gorgeous, and Lily could not think of a single thing to say. It must have cost so much... She gazed up at Sirius with wide eyes, then back at the dress robes. “When will I wear it?” she asked finally.

“At dinner tonight,” Black said with a grin.

“Oh.”

“Open Bones’s next,” Potter told her, hiding his own gift behind his back. The Auror had given her a thin gold ring with the inscription ‘Fire Flower’ on the inside. On top was a small black opal. Lily slipped it on her finger with the hint of a smile.

“Now mine,” Potter said, handing her the box. He stood back and ran a hand through his hair.

Surprised by his uncertain behavior, Lily slowly unwrapped the gold paper and saw a velvet box. Inside was the most beautiful necklace she had ever seen. “It’s wonderful,” she murmured. “Thank you.”

Potter grinned. “Want to put it on?”

She took it out of its box and clipped it around her pale neck. It was even prettier against the blackness of her robes. “I’m sorry,” she muttered. The boys all looked at her in surprise. “I didn’t get any presents for you.”

“I’d be a little scared if you had,” Black admitted, shuddering so violently that his hat jingled.

Potter ruffled his hair. “Actually...” He pointed up the ceiling. Floating innocently over their heads was a sprig of mistletoe.

“Do you even remember who you’re talking to?” Lily hissed, furious. Okay, so she was grateful for the gifts, but this was out of the question.

“Relax, babe,” Potter was smooth. “I’m just joshing.”

“Indeed?” She waved a hand at the mistletoe, aiming to center it over Black and Potter. Instead, it flew across the room and rested in the far corner.

Lily was suddenly very nervous. It wasn’t that the corner was particularly frightening (actually, as far as corners go, it was rather plain). It was more the two occupants of the corner that made her pale.

“Mr. Moody! Kinglsey!” Black shouted, a gleeful tone in his voice. Lily gulped quietly. “Look up!”

The two Aurors looked at Black, then, simultaneously, looked up at the mistletoe. Moody dove out of the way, somersaulting on the floor and safely landing several feet away from the offending herb. Shacklebolt, however, threw back his head and laughed.

“Hey, I brought you guys some cake,” came a voice from the doorway. Emmeline Vance walked in and set the cake on Lily’s table. She noticed Shacklebolt in the corner. “Look who’s all alone under the mistletoe,” Vance flipped her ginger hair over her shoulder with a grin. She sauntered over and cast a glance at Moody, who was still crouched on the floor. “Did Alastor desert you?” Shacklebolt nodded with sad eyes. “Aw, I’ll give you a kiss.” She stood on her tiptoes and pecked him on the lips. “Merry Christmas!”

Shacklebolt grinned. “You made my day,” he laughed.

“Just wait ‘til you try dinner!” she said, leading him over to the table.

“Do I have to?” He looked pleadingly at her. “I could just Apparate to the Three Broomsticks or something.”

Vance smacked him on the arm. Unsure around all the friendliness displayed by the Order, Lily muttered, "I like your cooking."

The woman grinned at her. "Finally, someone who appreciates my culinary skills!" She turned to Bones, who was approaching. "I like her."

"Me too," Bones' voice was light.

"Hey, Em, you know I was just joking, right?" Shacklebolt said quickly. "I didn't mean to-"

Vance rolled her eyes. "I know, Kingsley. Stop worrying," She smacked him on the arm again. "So, anyone up for cake?" As Bones conjured up five more chairs, Vance began slicing the cake. "Severus gets the first piece because he made it." Moody grumbled something, but she ignored him. She set the moist cake in front of Severus.

He picked up a fork and took a small bite. "Wonderful," he said dryly. "We should get an award."

Ignoring his acrimonious comments, Vance kept cutting. "Who wants to next slice?"

As everyone got their cake, Lily sat quietly, waiting for someone to notice that she was still there and take her back to her cell. The girl felt out of place just as Severus obviously did and wanted to get back to familiarity as quickly as possible.

However, she made no move to make herself noticed. Lily found herself enjoying watching the Order's playful banter. It reminded her of Christmas with Robin.

Petunia always was over at a friend's house, refusing to eat with the family on the holidays. Her parents often went on vacations together, leaving Robin and Lily to spend it alone. She couldn't help but think back to the first Christmas morning they had spent together.

After opening their presents, Robin and Lily retreated to the kitchen.

“Er, can you even cook?” Lily asked her brother as he pulled an egg carton from the fridge.

Robin turned to her, running his spare hand through his blonde hair. “I thought you could,” Robin replaced the eggs. “Isn’t that what girls do?”

“I’m eight,” Lily told him.

“And I’m only thirteen!” Robin retorted. “And I’m a guy!”

“Really? Could have fooled me,” Lily stuck her tongue out at him.

Robin opened the freezer. “How about ice cream?”

From then on, they spent every Christmas morning creating sundae sculptures, then devouring them rapidly, despite parental warnings and brain freeze.

“Hey Lily, don’t you want some cake?” Black asked as he cut his second slice.

All of her thinking about Robin had put a lump in her throat. She swallowed with difficulty, seeing how the table’s attention was on her. “No.”

“Are you sure?” Vance’s hands hovered over the cake. “We have plenty left.”

Lily was suddenly annoyed. These were her captors! ““Yes, I’m sure.” Her voice was cold and she used Occlumency to keep her grief from her face.

“She’s been working out all morning,” said Bones from down the table. “I should probably take her back to her room.”

Lily nodded briskly and waited for Bones to come around and help her up the stairs. He did, and they walked slowly to the door. “Don’t forget your presents!” Black called. Bones levitated them and let them follow behind.

They finally reached her room and Bones helped her sit on her bed. She was panting quietly from the stairs.

“Merry Christmas,” Bones said, heading towards the door.

“Wait!” He paused and turned back at her. “You... you wanted to talk about Robin, right?”

You can all tell why she said that right? Well, I hope so. Anyways, sorry for the wait. I’ve had band all week.

Edgar froze and stared incredulously at the girl. “Yes,” He tried to keep his voice smooth as he moved back over to her carefully. “I did.” Edgar made sure not to make any sudden movements as he halted a foot or so away.

She seemed diffident now that she had spoken. Edgar decided to take control of the conversation—gently, though, so as not to scare her off. “I just wanted to know who he is, and why he’s so... important to you.” He didn’t want to give away that he had been watching all those times when she had gently wept and said his name. Edgar summoned his chair and sat beside her bed, watching her closely. There was, once again, that almost imperceptible hint of grief in those green eyes.

“Are we... are we alone in here?” Her voice was casual, but Edgar could tell that she was uncomfortable. Her new inability to mask her emotions completely took a toll on her confidence. “Just you and me. No one else listening, right?”

Edgar thought fleetingly of Alastor, who quite possibly was watching them from the Observation Room. “No, we’re alone.” He wondered if the lie alarms were on, and hoped that they weren’t.

Lily stayed silent, looking straight at the concrete wall in front of her (which happened to be the wall Alastor would be watching from). Edgar watched her for what must have been five minutes.

As he was about to give another conversational nudge when she whispered, “If it wasn’t for me, he wouldn’t have died.” By gut investigatory instinct, he knew not to speak. When she turned her head to Edgar, he was shocked to see her eyes swimming with unshed tears. Tears from the past and present. “Robin was my brother.” She looked away again. “And he died saving me.” Her next words were laced with emotion. “It’s obvious that the wrong one of us lived. Sure, he wasn’t planning on becoming a missionary, but he’d be doing more good than I am. He was my hero, and then I killed him.”

“How?” Edgar leaned forward, keeping his voice soft so as to maintain the calm ambience.

“There... there was a car,” she choked out, though the tears were still withheld. Despite everything, she was trying not to show weakness. “I swear I didn’t see it coming! I was just... crossing the street. Then I heard him shout and push me out of the way. And then... when I turned around... I guess the driver hadn’t even seen us until a moment before... He hit Robin at around 40 kilometers an hour. Then the driver just drove away, not even getting out. I don’t know if he was drunk, or stoned, or just... didn’t care.”

Edgar was beside with fury for her. “Did you find him? Don’t Muggles have laws?”

“We looked,” she hissed. “I had seen his front plate and was going to kill him. We didn’t look long.”

“So you found him?” Edgar felt as triumphant as though he’d done it himself.

Lily shook her head. “Then my parents died. And I became the Stunner. Happy?” She was suddenly defiant. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that she had never told anyone that before.

“No, I’m not happy,” Edgar told her softly.

“What else can I tell you? Is there even-”

“Whoa, relax Lily. I meant I’m not glad that that happened to you. That must really eat you,” Edgar held out his empty hands to pacify her. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“I’m fine,” she spat. “I only told you that so I could get back to Hogwarts.”

Not commenting on her lie, Edgar lightly said, “I could get Kingsley to see if they ever found out who did it, you know.”

“No,” she said softly. “Don’t.”

“Why not?” Edgar was frustrated. “You’re not just trying to be tough or something, are you? ‘Cause that would be really-”

“Don’t you see?” Edgar blinked at her. “With my powers now, if I found out who did it I would actually kill him. For the safety of that man, don’t tell me, even if you do find out.” Then her eyes narrowed and she set her shoulders. “Now will you leave?”

He nodded and walked away. As he set his hand on the doorknob, he grinned. “Merry, merry Christmas.”

“I’m not using those,” Lily spat, barely resisting to urge to throw the heavily scented shampoo across the room.

Vance rolled her eyes. “You need to wash up.”

Lily sat on her bed looking through the stuff they had brought up so they could venture to the bathroom.

“Hey, Em. They sent me up here to help—Oh, hello Miss Evans,” said a woman, entering the room, brushing her thick brown hair behind one ear.

Despite her cheery smile and sparkling celery colored eyes, the chisled features gave her identity away immediately. “You’re a Black,” Lily assessed, masking her surprise. How often did you see one of those on the Light side?

“Yes, Bella and Narcissa’s older sister. I’m ten years or so older than them, of course. Mum was a child bride.” She walked over to them. “I’m more of a Tonks than a Black now, though.”

Lily inclined her head. “Andromeda of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black.”

Tonks’ mum laughed. At Lily’s icy face, she explained, “It’s been a long time since anyone has said that to me. I’m a blood-traitor, remember?”

Lily shrugged slightly, masking a scowl. “Your blood is still pure.”

“And my job is to make sure your hair is,” Vance interrupted. “Now, what’s wrong with cookie dough shampoo?”

Lily did not deem it appropriate to grace her with an answer. If the Order was going to make her go to Christmas dinner, she wouldn’t go smelling like dessert.

“Lily Evans!” Andromeda had the Black voice on now; proud and powerful. “You are going to gather all these things and follow me to the bathroom and shampoo with whatever shampoo Em says! Now.”

Years of training had told her that true purebloods had more authority than anyone else, and that she, a mudblood, was to obey without question or complaint, and Andromeda was a pureblood through and through. The Dark Lord had taught her that blood meant power. Andromeda held herself with a sort of confidence that showed that she had grown up as a pure Black. That gave her power over Lily whether she realized it or not.

Lily silently placed all of the bathing solutions onto the towel, then picked up the towel and waited for someone to help her walk. Vance walked over and pulled her to her feet, and they walked forward, Andromeda in the lead.

Inside the bathroom was a rather large tub that had been magically filled with hot, soapy water. Vance set her against the tub. “Get n,” Andromeda ordered. Both she and Vance turned their backs so that she could have privacy.

For a moment, Lily considered using wandless magic to fry them, but realized that she couldn’t go anywhere anyways. With all of her effort, Lily managed to undress and she slipped into the tub. It was so deep that when she sat down only head was above the bubbles.

Upon hearing the splash of her entering, the two women turned and walked up to her. “I’ll take the left side,” Vance murmured, grabbing a bottle of shampoo.

Lily's waist length hair was floating all around her, weaving and spreading like blood. Vance grabbed a section of it and began to work shampoo into it vigorously while Andromeda worked on the other side. The girl washed her body with one of the other cookie dough scented substances.

After ten minutes of intense scrubbing and rinsing, the women handed Lily a towel and turned away. Lily stood carefully and wrapped the fluffy white towel around her body. She sat on the marbled edge of the tub and muttered, "Ready."

"The only thing harder than washing it is brushing it." Andromeda raked a small comb through the bottom of Lily's hair. Vance had left to get herself ready for dinner. Apparently Christmas dinner with the Order was much fancier than breakfast.

As Andromeda brushed, she used her wand to brush Lily's mass of hair. Lily was easily able to ignore the pain as the comb pulled fiercely at a knot in the center. "So, you and Nymphie talk at school, right?"

It took Lily a second to realize that she spoke of Tonks. "Yes."

"She's a sweet girl. Very nervous about school, but she had Sirius, Remus, Peter and James on her side before she even got there. That really helped," Andromeda continued. "Sirius comes over to our house a lot, and he's my favorite little cousin. He's like her big brother."

I bet he's nowhere as near as Robin, she thought scathingly.

"Do you have any siblings?" Andromeda asked politely.

"A sister." Lily thought she masked her distaste rather well. Her ability to block emotions must have been healing.

"Do you like her?"

"No."

“Ah, I see,” Andromeda replied. There was a smile in her voice, and there was an understanding tone to it. “So, no other siblings? Ever?”

Edgar. He must have told the whole Order! “No,” she spat. “No others. Just me.” Lily was cut off from saying more by the lie alarm. Red lights flashed around the room and Lily was suddenly grateful that they had decided that handcuffs were no longer necessary. Lily’s lip curled slightly. She’s forgotten that even her speech was imprisoned here.

Once the alarms turned off (1), Andromeda spoke reprimanding. “Lily...”

Lily said no more, just stared at the wall flatly. Andromeda held her respect for being pureblood, but she wasn’t her mother. She had had one before and wasn’t looking for a replacement.

“You won’t even tell me his name?”

“Robin.” Lily’s lips barely moved. It took all her training not to turn around and strangle her. And Lily had thought that Sirius was the only Black lacking tack.

“And did you like him?” Andromeda asked, resuming brushing Lily’s hair.

“Yes.” Lily spoke so softly that she wasn’t sure if Andromeda heard her.

“My sisters and I don’t talk, for obvious reasons,” Andromeda said conversationally. “Know ‘em?”

“Yes,” Lily replied, “and no, I don’t particularly like them.”

“I heard that Narcissa’s engaged to that Malfoy boy. Is that true?”

“Yes. They’re a great couple. Lucius’s rich and pure, just like Narcissa.”

“Do they love each other?” Andromeda spoke as though she knew the answer.

Lily straightened her back slightly. “I’ve never seen them together. Lucius is out of school.”

“Do you know him? Have you, er, worked together?”

Lily did not answer the question. It was punishable to gossip of purebloods.

“You’ve read Pureblood Protocol, haven’t you?” Andromeda sighed, “Well, there, it’s brushed. I’ll let you get into those dress robes on now.” Andromeda rose and picked a box off the floor. Carefully, she laid the robes on the bed next to Lily and strode out the door, dark purple robes swishing against the floor. (2)

Once Lily had slipped into her dress robes and was sitting on the rough fabric of her comforter, she slowly ran a comb through her hair. The concrete of her cell was as dark as ash and made her chained heart feel even darker.

There was a knock at the door. It was in a syncopated rhythm, as though the person knocking was tapping out a song. “Come in,” Lily said as loudly she could.

Lily set the comb down as the door open to reveal, to her surprise, a bowing Sirius Black. “I’ve been given permission to escort you to dinner. Would you care to join me?”

Not directly answering, Lily asked, “Where are Potter and Remus? I thought you all had a Sticking Charm on you, or something.”

Black entered the room, not bothering to close the door behind him. Lily eyed it as he spoke. “James Flooded over to see his parents, and Remus is already downstairs. That’s how you got stuck with me.” Then he grinned widely as he looked at her. “I was right.”

Lily met his eyes with a raised eyebrow. “About what?”

“You do look hot in those robes.”

Lily rolled her eyes, relishing the fact that she could. “Just help me up,” she whispered.

Black put his arm around her waist and helped her to stand. With all of his Quidditch practice, he was easily able to hold her up as her legs wobbled beneath her.

As he escorted her down the stairs, he asked, “So, do you hate my brother as much as I do?”

“Depends on how much you hate him, I suppose,” Lily replied calmly.

“As much as I hate all cowards.” Black helped her down another stair.

Lily sighed. “You must really hate me then.”

She bit the inside of her lip. His eyebrows raised in surprise; not at the fact she’d spoken, but at her words. “I don’t hate you,” he said softly, “Not really. And you’re not a coward.”

“But I-”

“You did everything you could save a sister who hates you. Many people would’ve escaped and left her for dead. You were loyal.” He gazed at her, silver eyes intense.

Lily was leaning on his arm, but felt far from him. “You never would have done it. Stunned for the Dark Lord to save one person.”

“Well, yeah, but look, babe,” Black stopped their descent and ran a hand through his hair, “there are... different kinds of bravery. It’s doing what you think is right. It takes bravery to do what you’ve done.”

They stared at each other for a minute, and then Sirius reached over and opened the door to the dining room. He led her in and they sat next to each other. The entire Order seemed to be there. Everyone except...

“ ‘Scuse me,” said Moody, brushing past the back of a witch’s chair and settling down in between Bones and Shacklebolt. On Bones’ other side was a woman that Lily did not know. Beside her were Vance and Andromeda, who was to her daughter. Then sat Remus, who was next to Black. Lily did not look at the rest of the table because her eyes landed on the person to her immediate left.

“Hello Severus.”

“Hello Lily,” he greeted. He gave a small smile. “You look beautiful tonight.”

“You look good too.” Indeed he did. His solid black robes stressed his onyx eyes and his slightly greasy hair was smoothed back into a low ponytail that was held up by a thin black ribbon.

“Er, do you know who that is?” Lily casually flicked her eyes to Bones’ companion.

“I’m not sure,” Severus said, following her gaze to the brunette.

“Oh, are you talking about Sara?” Black interrupted, leaning towards them. At Lily’s small nod, he said, “That’s Edgar’s fiancé. She works at the Ministry as an Unspeakable.”

Lily was interested. “An Unspeakable? That’s rather unique.” Then, she blinked. “Bones is engaged?”

“Yeah, he proposed a month or two ago. It’s a really good story, actually. What happened was-.” Black was cut off by the arrival of Potter.

“Hey Sirius!” he greeted, sliding into the chair next to him. “I was just talking to Mum and...” He caught sight of Lily on Black’s other side and trailed off. “You’re gorgeous.” He smiled fully, showing his white teeth.

Lily didn’t say anything. No retort seemed to fit the situation.

“You’re wearing the necklace.” Potter grinned wider.

“Observant, isn’t he,” snarled Severus into Lily’s ear.

“Indeed,” Lily replied dryly to them both.

“Awesome,” he murmured, open adoration in his hazel eyes.

Then a man in a funny looking hat rose, gave the toast and the food was served.

“So, that’s the Stunner?” asked Sara with a snort. “She’s really scary. I think my Pygmy Puff just ran for cover.”

Edgar grinned lightly. “Come on, Sara. You’ve read the Prophet.”

“How do we even know that this is the Stunner? She might just be a decoy,” Sara argued, looking across the table at Lily. The girl was slowly eating a slice of leftover Christmas morning cake.

“Because the only person who can wake up her victims is Dumbledore. No normal chick has that much power,” Edgar told her.

Sara still looked doubtful. “Big deal, she can use a Stunner. I’m sure-”

“She’s also a Dark adept. Trust me, that’s the Stunner.”

“A Dark adept?” Sara paled. “And you’re just letting her sit there, free as a bird.”

“She’s not going to do anything.” At that moment, however, Lily looked distastefully at the cake and put her hand over it. In a second it was burnt black. “Dangerous,” Edgar amended.

He pulled out his wand and sent a spell at the cake to transport it to the garbage bin. Lily looked up and let the smallest smile grace her lips. Then she saw Sara, who was glaring at her and her smile fell and an emotionless mask was placed on her face.

"I thought you said she was a Dark adept." Sara was eyeing Lily the way one eyes road kill; interested, yet disgusted.

"She is."

"Then what's up with her powers? Not to sound repetitive, but are you sure she is?"

"A nasty side effect from a nasty potion," Edgar replied, flicking his eyes towards Snape, who was trying to engage Lily in conversation. She was looking rather annoyed.

"Convenient," Sara remarked. "Look, you're probably right, but I just have to wonder."

"Yeah..." Edgar replied thoughtfully, looking over at Lily, the seed of suspicion planted in his mind.

1- That means someone is in the room next door. Wonder who? ... duh.

2- Going to make sure no one's watching over her room for the next few minutes.

Sorry it's kind of short. I have the next 40 pages or so, just not typed. Sorry for the delay! Review please.

The sun was glistening off of the dewdrops that clung to each tropical leaf in the Amazon. It was a beautiful... Lily wished that she could see it.

"Focus, Evans," growled Moody.

They were in the Weight Room, helping Lily regain full use of her Dark Magic. She was seated on the floor while Moody stood behind her. Lily felt the heat of her power collecting in her fingers, so she let it fly at the bull's-eye. CRASH!

"Were you even aiming? Reparo!" he said, wand pointed at the destroyed chest press. The tiny pieces melded together and repaired, though the front and back legs had been switched.

Lily clenched her teeth together and took aim again. This time she tried to shred the bull's-eye. However, her anger at Moody manifested itself and the blast of power was so great that the entire wall was in inch-wide slices. Slowly, it toppled backwards.

"How's it going?" said Bones from the doorway. "I just wanted to check—Who paper-shredded the wall?"

"Who do you think?" Moody grunted. "Reparo."

As the wall flew back to its original shape, Bones asked, "Any improvement?"

"No," replied Lily and Moody at the same time.

"I'll just... sit over here," said Bones quickly, going to the far back corner of the room.

Moody began pacing back and forth. "Why can't you just focus? Is that too much to ask?"

Lily clenched her teeth tightly to keep herself from retorting. Bloody Auror... she thought furiously.

“Try it again,” Moody instructed, moving back behind Lily.

She decided to shoot a small hole in the bull’s-eye this time, to show Moody she could. Focusing her power, she shot towards the target. The resulting hole was wider than she was tall.

She could see the outside world through the wall. It was raining on the field outside, bitterly cold, misty and utterly inviting to the girl. Clenching her teeth, she recalled Moody’s blatant explaining that they didn’t trust her and had therefore erected an Anti-Apparition dome over the hotel. Lily felt a small smirk tug at her lips as the hole sealed itself. They shouldn’t trust her.

However, she did not unclench her teeth as she took a deep breath to regroup her thoughts. The heat of her anger ran down her arm and erupted as fire through her outstretched fingers. The wall burst into a large pile of gray ashes in which flecks of fire could be seen struggling for life.

Moody looked, dumbfounded, as the fires outside were extinguished by the torrent of rain from outside. “Just try to fix that,” Lily muttered to herself, fire still burning in her eyes.

“You did that on purpose!” Moody looked wildly from the remains of the wall to Lily. “You know it’s impossible to reverse ashes!”

“What’s wr—oh.” Bones approached them, wiping his brow with his black sleeve. Lily turned with little difficulty on the floor and looked at him. “Really, Lily,” he began, “that was a beginner’s mistake. You should at least control it enough not to destroy the whole building.”

“A beginner’s mistake,” Bones’ fiancé walked into the room. “How shocking.”

“Sara, now’s not the time to—”

“I wonder why,” the woman continued, adjusting her robe sleeve.

Lily turned away from her then, focusing her attention on the field outside, looking so frigidly appealing. If she could just run for it...

Moody spoke up, "What are you talking about?"

"Sara." There was a warning tone in Bones' voice now.

"I can't just sit here while the real Stunner's still out there somewhere!"

"Are you saying that this isn't Evans?" Moody walked over to Lily and peered into her eyes. "Looks like her."

"You bloody idiot! Maybe Evans isn't the Stunner!" Bones' fiancé exploded.

Moody's face darkened. "If you think this isn't the Stunner, then you're the 'bloody idiot', not me."

"Let's not talk here," Bones' interrupted. "Lily, you keep practicing."

"What proof do you have that she's the Stunner?"

"What proof don't we have?" Moody retorted. "Dark adept and she—"

"She's not so adept. Didn't you see her blow up the wall?"

Lily tuned out the conversation and focused her energy on the ashes. She pooled her power into her fingers and let it fly. In the enforced silent calm in her mind, she imagined the wall reverting back to its original shape. It'd been a while since she'd attempted repair; it was the hardest branch of the Dark Arts.

Slowly the ash turned to stone and melted together and formed large blocks which connected like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. When the wall was whole again, she turned to face the arguing duo.

"...think she'd jump out a window? It's the perfect excuse!"

"She was bloody trying to escape!" Moody shouted. "Is it really that hard to get?"

“This is probably the first time she’s ever used Dark Magic!”

“She used it when we first met!”

“Then it’s the second!”

“What about the Mark?”

“Fake.”

Moody looked ready to pull out his hair. “You can’t fake the Mark of Salazar, you bloody woman!”

“Alastor, was that really necessary?” Bones interjected.

“How would you know? Have you ever tried?” Bones’ fiancé continued, ignoring Bones.

Lily sat, hands neatly folded, watching the argument with great hilarity. “I’m not even a Slytherin,” Lily offered softly.

“She’s not even a Slytherin!” the woman shouted, grasping onto the argument, gesturing blindly at her, keeping furious eyes on Moody. “She doesn’t have it in her!”

“Grah...” Moody burst inarticulately, frustrated beyond words.

“Sara, honey, I think you should—”

“We should make her tell us who the real Stunner is! That Snape kid will know,” the woman continued, running a hand sharply through her black hair. “He’s probably the one who hired her!”

“She’s gah!” Moody exclaimed.

“That whole ‘Robin’ sob story was just a way to gain your trust! Well, I’m not going to sit here and let her lead the Stunner to you!”

How did she know about...? Lily's eyes blazed and she felt more power gather within her, frothing. The energies were too much, too strong. It wouldn't stay inside! It was boiling over!

Emerald turned to ruby and Lily gritted her teeth. How dare she insult Robin! How dare... how dare... NO!

Lily was suddenly on her feet and clutched her head in her hands, tearing at her blood red hair, trying to take away the turmoil inside her head. “No... no...no! Not Robin! Not—NO!”

[illegible]

This woman's insane, Alastor thought. "Grah," he growled again.

“NO!” Huh?

“Duck!” Edgar cried, leaping forward and pushing Sara to the ground. An orange orb of magic flew over their heads and hit Alastor in the stomach, sending him flying into the triceps extender machine. “Thanks, Edgar,” he gasped as he pulled himself to his feet.

Alastor looked towards Evans, who was hovering a foot or so off the floor, arms shot horizontally out to either side of her body. Suddenly, flame shot out of her hands, writhing and grasping at the gym.

Edgar pulled Sara to her feet and started for the door. "You can't just leave!" Alastor shouted after him.

The man just hurried forward, limping slightly. Sara looked unharmed, if frightened beyond words. “Believe me now!” Alastor called after her, but she didn’t react to his words.

Once Edgar reached the door, he set Allison just outside of it and shouted for backup. Oh.

Alastor fired a Stunning spell at the Stunner, but she held up a hand and it rebounded on him. He jumped aside and rolled a few feet to

stop behind a stack of weights. What was with this sudden mood swing? (1) And what was it directed at him! (2)

“I finally admit who I am, and no one even believes me!” Evans’ voice, raspy as it was, echoed around the battered room. “And if they do believe me, they hate me! What the bloody hell do you want from me?”

Edgar rushed forward. “This isn’t who you are!” Evans glared at him. Alastor realized with a shudder that her eyes were red. “You’re not just the Stunner! You’re a good person!”

“You don’t even know me!” The girl, despite her harsh words, landed on the ground in front of Edgar. “You’re the enemy,” she leaned closer, “and I’m going to kill your fiancé.”

“No!” There was panic in Edgar’s voice. “She’s just a stupid girl. Don’t do anything you’ll regret. She didn’t know what she was talking about.”

Evans seemed unstable on her feet. “She said Robin was a lie.”

“She’s stupid and dumb and judgmental and stupid! Don’t pay any attention to her!”

“Just a stupid...” Evans toppled to the floor mid-sentence. Her magic had given in to her pain.

As Alastor walked over to Edgar to help pick up the girl, Sara appeared in the doorway, looking thunderous. “How dare you call me stupid!”

“He just saved your life,” Alastor spat. Then, he gave a hard smile. “Brave now she’s unconscious, eh?”

Sara rolled her eyes and turned on her heel and exited the room. "C'mon, let's get Evans back to her room," said Alastor softly.

[illegible]

“No!” Lily hissed, opening her eyes. Both Moody and Bones were standing over her bed. “I didn’t mean it, but she... No, I didn’t mean it at all! I don’t know that got into me!”

“Hush,” Bones said, raising his hand. Lily flinched as he laid it gently on her forehead.

“I—I’m sorry,” Lily gasped. She could feel them coming. They broke through. Tears raced down her cheeks. “I almost killed someone.” Her next thought caused her to shiver, but she fought it down. “It wasn’t an order or threat or anything. It was what I wanted.”

“Lily—”

“If I were you I would turn me in to the Ministry too,” Lily spoke jaggedly through her sobs.

“We’re—”

“I’ve gone insane. I knew it would happen. I’ve probably been crazy for years without even noticing! I’m worse than Him!”

“Now that—”

“First I don’t want to be a Stunner. Then, I don’t want people to know I’m the Stunner. Then I have to prove I’m the Stunner!” Lily’s voice rose as she spoke, both in volume and pitch. “In Azkaban they won’t care that I’m the Stunner. Just another psycho among hundreds.”

“Lily!” She saw Bones’ face through her tears. It was surprisingly calm. A gentle hand pushed her head, which had risen, back down on the soft pillow. “Relax. You’re not going to jail.”

“But I want to kill your fiancé,” Lily murmured, eyes closing. “I tried to.”

“Your Dark magic took over you. No more. No less.”

“But I still want to kill her.” The pillow was very soft...

“Well, that part’s you. But actually trying to kill her Darkness.”

“Told you it was dangerous,” growled a voice.

Lily blinked and a tear slipped down her face. “How long am I going to be here?”

“Well, school starts in a couple of days, so...”

“You mean I can back?” Get a hold of yourself, Lily! She fell silent and tried to block all the emotions from her mind.

“Of course you are. Part of our deal.” Bones sat on the edge of her bed. “But, I was wondering what made you attack Sara.”

“She insulted...” Lily trailed off, feeling the anger build up in her again.

“Lily, surely people have insulted you before.” Bones looked surprised. “Wasn’t there something else?”

“Robin...” Lily finished, using her energies to catch her breath.

“Ah.” Bones’ hand pushed a strand of hair from her forehead.

“I don’t get it,” Moody interjected. Bones shot him a sharp look and he fell silent.

“Sorry about the crying,” Lily muttered between choking sobs. “I’m not normally this... I’ll stop in a minute.”

“Sh...” Bones stroked her forehead again. Just like her dad used to. “When’s the last time you really cried like this?”

Lily could remember it vividly. “Second year.”

Bones’ eyebrows rose. “That long? Why?”

“Duh,” said Moody. “The Dark Lord probably hates crying.”

“Well, it was only my second time feeling the—the Cruciartus, so it just... stuck with me.” Lily choked back another sob.

“He—!”

“Alastor! Go.” Moody grumbled to himself and slinked out of the room.

Lily, ashamed, reached up and swiped at her tears. “Sorry.” She struggled to sit up and collect herself, but Bones’ soft hand kept her down. She fought harder against his hand so he let her up. She sat up and hung her head down, sobbing. She had lost it. Lily Evans had tried to murder an innocent woman. And Robin’s memory had been smashed by that woman. Crying was so stupid.

After a few minutes, the sobs turned to sniffles, then vanished. Taking deep breaths, she looked up to see Bones staring at her, an unidentifiable expression on his face. “That was quite a cry.”

Lily felt her stomach draw into her spine. Now it was coming. She had cried and was going to be punished. That was the same thing the Dark Lord had said. Aurors could use Cruciartus now...

So, as Bones put his hand forward again, Lily pushed herself backwards, colliding sharply with the headrest. “I didn’t—!”

His hand froze awkwardly. Bones’ face was full of that emotion. “Don’t ever be afraid of me.” He reached down and smoothed back her hair one last time. “Ever.”

(1)Gotta love silly, oblivious Moody (1)

(2) See above (2)

Please review with any predictions or questions!

“Hogwarts is about to start back and she’s still not here!” Voldemort hissed. “Why weren’t you watching closer?”

The eldest Black sister inclined. “We were trying not to be too obvious, just as you ordered.”

Bellatrix was proud. Maybe a little too proud. “I don’t remember telling you to lose her! Crucio!” The girl let out a scream. She didn’t move or twitch. She just threw back her head and screamed. Vel never screamed. Servants shouldn’t scream. Screaming was for victims. “Stop screaming! Crucio!”

Slowly, Bellatrix's voice died away and Voldemort lifted the curse. "Good girl."

"I'm sorry, Master," the girl mumbled, head low.

“Good.” Voldemort looked at the rest of the group of Hogwarts recruits and hissed, “If the Stunner is not back at school in three days’ time, I will be short eight followers. Understood?” (1) Savvy? (1)

The servants muttered agreements and were dismissed. Once again, the Snape boy was absent from the group. He would have his harsh punishment when he returned. The Dark Lord twirled his wand in giddy anticipation.

[illegible]

“I see you’re feeling better,” the Headmaster commented as he sat across from her, Moody at his side. Bones was not present so Lily was feeling nervous. It’s not easy having a conversation with your greatest threat. “I’m glad.”

Lily straightened her back so that it was slightly off the back of the chair and watched him, expressionless.

“How much do you know about Voldemort?” At Lily’s silence, Dumbledore corrected himself. “That is to say, how much do you know about one Tom Riddle?”

Lily stayed silent, holding back her questions. Who was Riddle? A Death Eater? A victim?

"Tom Marvolo Riddle and Voldemort are one and the same, Lily. He has not been a Dark Lord forever."

Lily blinked at him. Voldemort human? Impossible. "That's not true." Lily was surprised by her own defiant hiss. She sounded like Him.

"Yes it is," retorted Moody.

Lily repressed the urge to say 'Nuh uh,' and gently bit her tongue.

"I suggest," Dumbledore said, "you ask him yourself."

"No!" she exclaimed. More firmly now, she bit on her tongue. What was with these emotional outbursts? She was in as much danger here as anywhere else, maybe more. Anyone could destroy her if they saw her weakness.

"Then take his word for it." Moody growled.

"I can give you proof... will you hear it?"

Do I have a choice? Lily nodded to him once.

"Tom's mother was a witch, and his father was a Muggle named Tom Riddle..."

Human? Weak? She had to wonder when he finished whether he was talking about the Voldemort she knew. But, it made sense...

"How does this affect me?" she asked softly.

"He's not indestructible, or all-powerful. He's just another human." Dumbledore rose. "I thought you needed to know that. We will be seeing each other soon." He swept out of the room.

Cautiously accepting Moody's proffered arm, Lily stood and moved back to the bed to lie down and rest. She had a lot to think about.

"I thought you weren't coming back until I was gone!" James hugged both of his parents.

"We wanted to surprise you. After tomorrow we don't get to see you until graduation." His mum turned to Sirius and Remus, who were sitting on the couches watching the scene. "How'd you all like your presents?"

"They were wonderful, thank you." Remus grinned.

"Bloody brilliant!" exclaimed Sirius. Ignoring James' mum's remark of "Language," he continued, "Thanks Mum." James' dad coughed. "And Dad."

Harold, James' dad, smiled. "Clint was happy to help. We knew each other back at Hogwarts. My captain for a few years, though he was younger.

"What did you do to occupy yourselves? Not getting into any trouble, I hope," James' mum looked doubtful at her husband's words but waited for the reply.

"Just hung around. Talked to Lily a bit." Sirius leaned back on the couch languidly.

"Oh, so you've, er, seen the Stunner, then," his dad cleared his throat. "Now, boys, we really need to discuss this-

"Dad!" James cut in. "You're not really about to lecture us about talking to Evans!"

"Of course he is!" his mother snapped, striding up to James and tilted his head down to inspect his face. "She could have killed you!"

"Mum, she's only seventeen," James told her. "I've known her for six years."

“We heard about the whole Stunner incident a couple of days ago,” his dad looked ready to say more, but his mother cut in again.

“She almost killed Alastor! I told Albus that it was a bad idea for her to stay here, especially with you all here too!”

“Then I suppose now would be a bad time,” Sirius interjected, standing and approaching them, “that we’ve been assigned to watch her at school.”

James waited for the explosion with tense shoulders. "What!" his mum bellowed, "I need a word with Albus about-"

“Mum! Just because you didn’t want to be in the Order doesn’t mean you can decide what I do in it.”

“He’s right, Denise,” his dad said softly. “You need to let him make his own decisions.”

“Let’s not ruin our last day of the break with arguing!” Sirius said, resting his arms on James’ and his dad’s shoulders.

"Sirius is right," his dad said calmly. "But I must, er, warn you to be careful."

“We know,” assured Remus.

It won't stop me from helping her, thought James defiantly.

[illegible]

“Hey.” Potter conjured a chair and settled beside her bed.

Lily tried not to look as annoyed as she felt. "Hello."

“How’re you feeling?”

“Fine.”

"I found her," panted Bellatrix. Relief showed on everyone's faces "Now," she turned to Lily, "where were you?" Her voice was a purr, but the stray wisps of black hair that hovered over her blue eye increased the image of insanity.

"The only person I need to tell is not in the compartment right now." The train jolted forward, but Lily held her ground. "You can send the Dark Lord an owl saying you 'found' me. Inform him that I'll be contacting him soon." Lily turned to the door in the silence. "Oh, and if you see Snape, send him straight to Compartment 67. Immediately."

"Yes, milady," murmured one student, a fifth year. While Bellatrix glared at him, Lily slipped out of the compartment.

She had only gotten a few yards when she heard Sirius Black holler, "I found her!"

She narrowed her eyes. "Idiot," she muttered and put a finger to her lips, nodding to the compartment behind her.

Black winked and placed a finger to his lips too. "C'mon," he stage-whispered. Black turned and started walking up the hall. The train bumped as the wheels hit something on the track and Black fell over.

Lily, who had not even stumbled, took the opportunity to turn right and slip into Compartment 67. Inside sat a trio of young Ravenclaws, all discussing the novel that was in each of their hands, depicting hands holding an apple. "...pires really don't have those powers. Muggles just..." the speaking girl trailed off when Lily sat down beside her. "Excuse me, but that seat's saved for Jon."

Lily raised her eyebrows calmly, though internally furious for being thrust back into the world. "Are you going to try to make me move?"

The students looked to each other. One boy mumbled, "Let's just sit somewhere else."

"But we were here—"

“Come on!” squealed one girl, grabbing her friend’s arm and pulling her from the compartment.

“Why are we moving?” argued one boy.

“Didn’t you see?” said the squeaky blonde, “She was going to get Bellatrix Black to beat us up!”

Lily growled under her breath and waved her hand at the door. It slammed shut with more force than she had intended, but Lily wasn’t paying attention.

Bones had assured her that, once she graduated, they would find a way for her to escape Voldemort. Lily had told herself not to get her hopes, but had anyways. Now she realized it was completely impossible.

She could never escape. She had gotten a slight break over Christmas, but now she was back in the world where she was Voldemort’s most trusted supporter and would be forever under his control. What with Bellatrix and the new Death Eaters watching her every move, she’d never find a way to get away. She refused to let herself live in a dream world any longer. It must be her fate to die for Voldemort, not fighting against him.

She stared blankly out the compartment window, seeing nothing but her future.

“Evans.” A voice ‘tsked’ from the doorway. Lily looked over as casually as she could and saw it was only Black.

“Weren’t you going to sit with Potter, Pettigrew and Lupin?” Lily turned her gaze back to the window. The landscape was flashing by too fast to follow. It reminded Lily of her life.

She heard the compartment door click shut and the seat next to creaked. “Weren’t you?” he asked softly.

Lily made no sound in reply, only brushed a lock of red hair from her face.

"You know what Edgar said. He thought it'd better for you stuck by us." Black's voice was still soft. He seemed concerned for her. He was a good actor. No one cared about anyone but themselves.

"Better for your precious Order, maybe," Lily hissed. What would happen if Bellatrix walked in and saw Lily talking to her Gryffindor cousin.

Black rustled behind her. Suddenly his face was in front of hers. "You're blocking my view."

"Of what?" Black looked behind him. "The big green blur?"

"I'm counting cows," Lily defended herself.

"Oh yeah? How many are you on now?"

"Forty-eight."

"We're in a forest," Black told her. Looking closer at said green blur, she realized they were, in fact, pine trees.

Lily had a retort on her tongue, but did not speak it. (1) In case you were wondering, the retort happened to be "The cows are in the trees!" (1) She focused on a spot somewhere over Black's head. "How did you know I was in here?"

"The fleeing Ravenclaws were a dead giveaway." Lily looked at Black's grinning face. "I thought that one little guy was going to wet himself."

Lily suppressed a smile and muttered, "Right."

"Go ahead and laugh. You know I'm hilarious." Black's silver eyes were as bright as stars, alive with mischief.

Lily raised an eyebrow. "And your definition of hilarious is..."

Black rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "Ha ha." Then his smile fell a degree. "You know, we don't get to talk much."

Lily clenched her teeth. "Did you notice the difference in this conversation and every other we've had?"

Black blinked. "You... haven't rolled your eyes yet?"

Lily gave sickly sweet smile. "I'm not in handcuffs... and," Lily put her wand to Black's forehead, "I have my wand." She kept her voice calm and loving as though she wanted nothing more than to murder him.

Black snorted. "Are you trying to make me leave? 'Cause I'm not."

Lily pushed the wand harder into his olive skin. "Get out."

Completely ignoring the death threats and the wand at his head, he spoke casually. "You won't actually hurt me. You hate hurting people." He lifted a hand and pushed the wand away. "So stop pretending all the time."

Lily carefully replaced her wand in her pocket and inched backwards. "You're an idiot," she informed him.

"So I've been told," Black laughed. "Many times."

"What are you going to do when Bellatrix walks in?" Lily began drumming her fingers restlessly on the chair's arm.

"Do you think I'm scared of Bella?" Black snorted. "I'm more likely to bust my gut laughing at her than fearing for my life."

"You should be afraid. She wouldn't care if she got arrested for killing us."

"I've known her a lot longer than you," Black retorted. "She'd be so busy screaming she wouldn't have time to kill us."

Lily thought for a second. "I could see that happening," she concurred.

“Well, you never know,” Black said with a smirk. “She’s a crazy b-”

“Black,” greeted a voice from the doorway. “Lily.”

Lily turned around saw Severus standing uncomfortably by the door. His robes were sharp and ironed, the result of one of his spells. Black hair hung loose around his sallow face, giving him the vague air of a vampire. He stepped into the room, briskly setting himself across from Lily. Severus had cast a spell on his cloak that caused it to billow violently behind him when he moved, giving him a suitably menacing touch to his appearance.

“Why’s your cloak fluttering like that?” Black asked, turning his intense gaze on Severus. The difference in the two black-haired boys was astounding. Severus was pale, yet dark while Sirius was dark, yet light.

Severus sniffed and scowled. Black snorted. “I bet you thought you looked right scary.”

Ignoring Black’s jibes about his outfit, Severus focused on Lily. “Bellatrix said you were looking for me. Why?”

“Oh, I wasn’t,” Lily told him.

“Then why-?”

“Because if I hadn’t, you’d probably be in there getting the third degree,” Lily paused, “Metaphorically and literally.”

“Huh?” Black asked.

“Well, Black,” Severus snapped, “we’re not going to explain it. The wit might be too much for that feeble mind of yours to bear.”

Black snarled and leapt at Severus. Lily slipped out her wand and froze him before he could get in a second punch. Gently, Severus touched his bruised jaw. “And I thought you were strong.”

Black fought against his bonds, but Lily's spell held strong. "He's been aching to get at you since the moment you walked in."

Black managed to look confused even with frozen features. Maybe it was a permanent thing for him. "You don't have to be a mind-reader to see that." Lily flicked her wand and moved Black back to his seat next to her before undoing the spell. She caught Severus stowing his own wand as she did so. As Black steamed silently, Lily said, "That reminds me, Severus... Legillimens!"

A flash of blue crossed her mind before she saw herself staring into Severus' eyes. It was though they were black whirlpools, pulling her in, deeper and deeper. She removed her spell quickly. A bead of sweat slithered down Severus' face as he sat back.

"That was brilliant," Lily finally said. "When did you...?"

Severus met her eyes. "I'm not stupid, Lily. I know what will happen if the Dark Lord gets into my mind now."

"But that-

"It wasn't that hard," Severus shrugged, "A little practice."

Lily thought it over. "Did you know," she said, choosing each word carefully, "that it took me four years to Occlude my mind? That He knew my every thought of rebellion until then? And then you just take a 'little practice' and..."

Severus scowl made her trail off. "That sounded rather bitter," Severus spoke in casual tone.

"No, I'm just... jealous. You're a genius." Black crossed his arms and frowned harder. "He's been rather quiet," Lily commented.

Severus' voice held no shame. "I hit him with a Muffler. He can not hear us."

"See? Genius," Lily flashed Severus a small smile, and then muttered the counter-curse.

“What was that about?” he asked immediately.

“We were merely discussing which hexes would make you leave faster,” Lily murmured. “I said a simple Jelly Legs would do, but Severus was just so keen on the Balding Charm...”

“You wouldn’t.” Black reached up and ran a hand through his black locks. He sighed in relief, but just as he started to pull his hand away, there was a small ‘pop’ and all of his hair vanished. Black let out a yelp and glared at Severus. He looked ready to punch him again, so Lily said, “Remus can probably fix it before we get back to castle if you hurry and ask him.”

Black leaped to his feet and bolted from the compartment, bald pate shining in the candlelight. "You were right," Severus smirked, "I've wanted to do that for ages."

[illegible]

"If only I had known," Severus said, shaking his head. Lily had to agree.

Black swaggered in front of them, Lily's roommate, Jessica Fairfield, on his arm. "Sirius," she sighed and snuggled deeper onto his arm, "You look so handsome."

What Lily and Severus had overlooked was that Remus' specialties were Transfiguration and Defense, not Charms. Instead of restoring Black's hair to its original shaggy black, it was now short and blonde.

“He looks Lucius with a potent Tanning Charm,” Severus observed softly. “Only less cocky.”

“So you know Malfoy,” Lily muttered. They were walking together, but made it look like they were ignoring each other.

“Who doesn’t know Lucius Malfoy?” Severus quickly masked his bitter look with one of indifference. “But who cares?”

Lily raised her eyebrows briefly. "Lucius is engaged to Narcissa," she mentioned.

"I am perfectly aware of that, Lily," he replied icily.

Lily didn't bother to respond as she was swept to the Gryffindor table. Taking her usual spot closest to the exit, she waited for the food to appear.

Once everyone had been seated, Dumbledore stood up. This was odd. He normally reserved his speeches for the start of school. Sparkling blue eyes ran over the Great Hall, pausing briefly on Black's newly blonde head and continuing down the table until he met Lily's eyes.

Oh no. He wouldn't warn the school about her, would he? Lily suddenly wasn't so sure.

"I would welcome each of you back. However, seeing as that would take hours, I'll just say a few words to you all. I hope your break was enjoyable and you didn't forget everything you learned. I would also like to mention a peer-counseling group for those with losses due to Lord Voldemort. If anyone has any questions, please see the Head Boy," he gestured to Remus, who waved, "Or Head Girl." The Ravenclaw, Clover, rose and giggled.

"Now dinner may commence." Dumbledore sat down and food appeared.

Lily was barely three bites into her potatoes when she heard the rustle of robes of someone sitting across from her. Hoping it was a random underclassman, Lily kept her eyes down.

"Sirius said he found you on the train," Potter said casually.

"Really," drawled Lily. She could feel Bellatrix's eyes on her. "How interesting."

"Yeah," agreed Potter, "That he had to find you. Why didn't you just come sit with us?"

"It's too dangerous now," Lily muttered, lips barely moving. "It has been too dangerous."

"No." Potter was gazing intently at her. "We're going to protect you." Lily shrugged slightly. She jumped slightly when his warm hand touched hers. "You need to trust us."

"Why bother?" Lily moved her hand away. It was shockingly warm from the contact with him. His bright hazel eyes watched her sadly. Pity just watched with him, and Lily loathed it.

"Because I really do love you," he said. Lily's breath caught in her throat. Then she realized it in a sigh. Couldn't anyone just be honest with her?

"You don't even know me." Lily looked at plate, which looked suddenly unappetizing, and then rose. "Adieu."

Lily had just escaped the Great Hall when the doors opened behind her again. "Evans!" Recognizing it as one of the younger Slytherins, she turned. "Black gave me a Galleon to give this to you."

He handed over a parchment. She nodded to the boy and continued walking to the Tower.

Upon finding the dorm empty, Lily unrolled the note. 'Tomorrow. Midnight. Forest. The DL called a meeting. You might want to attend. -BB.'

Now that she was in privacy of her dormitory, she allowed herself to shudder. She knew what would happen if she went... but also what would happen if she didn't.

Please review to find out what happens. As I mentioned in the beginning, I'll post a half page for every review I get on this chapter until I decide its not working. So, this length is 20 reviews. Forty would be double... :D

“I must speak with the Headmaster!”

“Nope,” repeated the gargoyle, scratching its head idly, “y’need the p.w.”

And she’d thought Black was annoying. “I really don’t have time for this! Open!” If only it would just blow up or something—BOOM!

Pieces of stone and dust rocketed out, leaving the staircase clear. Once on the stairs, Lily waved a hand at the statue, returning it to its original state. “Hey, you can’t do that!” it called.

“Too late,” Lily muttered to herself.

Before she could grasp the griffin knocker to Dumbledore’s office, the door swung open. “Would I be wrong to assume that noise was you?”

Lily shook her head dumbly. “Come in.” Lily slinked past Dumbledore and looked around in surprise. So it wasn’t a secret torture room. However, the thing that caught her eye immediately was the magnificent phoenix in one corner.

Its scarlet feathers gleamed innocently in the new light, creating a halo around it. Piecing amber met Lily’s searching eyes and she quickly averted them.

“Have a seat, Miss Evans.” Dumbledore gestured to the chair opposite his own bigger one. “How may I be of service?”

“I need to know what this bracelet does,” she said quickly. Dumbledore’s eyebrows furrowed. Lily kept her face composed. “I’ve been called to meet with the Dark Lord in fifteen hours. I need to know.”

“I apologize, Miss Evans. I do not know the details. Alastor created it.” Dumbledore sighed. “Care for a lemon drop?”

“Well, then I already know what it’ll do. May I be excused?” Lily muttered, ignoring the offer for the sweet.

Dumbledore didn't look ready to stop. "What do you think it will do?"

"They'll probably just get a message."

"Maybe, but let us Floo Alastor and see."

Lily had to hide a look of panic. "That will not be necessary, Headmaster. I don't need to know."

"Pish posh." Dumbledore moved to the large fireplace and took a gold pot into his wizened hands. He threw the glistening powder into the blazing fire. A wild pillar of emerald flame shot up. "Alastor, a word, please."

After a moment or two, Moody's gnarled face appeared in the flames. "What?" he asked brusquely, looking over his shoulder at whatever scene lay there. "Quickly please, Albus. Someone just brought in Dolohov."

"I only need a moment. Miss Evans was wondering about the function of the bracelet." Dumbledore moved aside in a swish violet robes to allow Moody full view of the room.

Moody raised the remains of his eyebrows and said, "Are you planning on escaping anytime soon?"

Lily swallowed her retort and murmured, "Of course not. However, I am meeting the Dark Lord tonight."

"See!" Moody exclaimed. "See? She just stands there and tells us she's about to betray us!"

"Alastor!" Dumbledore's blue eyes flashed behind his half-moon glasses. "Let her speak."

"He'll want to know where I've been and I have to give him an answer. Otherwise, he'll discover the truth."

"How?"

Moody was such a dolt. I dunno, torture, maybe? "He has his ways." Lily kept her answer as ambiguous as possible.

Moody rolled his eyes. "The whole point is to stop you from leaving school."

"I'm not sure she has a choice," Dumbledore said calmly. "We must accept the necessity of this meeting."

"But I—"

"It's not like I want to go," Lily muttered.

She bit her tongue when Moody looked at her. Floo connection must emphasize noises. "Then why are you going?"

Lily briefly entertained the idea of blowing him up. "I have to give him a reason why I didn't contact him," she repeated.

"Why not owl him?"

As Moody questioned her, Dumbledore moved back behind his desk and sat down. "Are we bothering you, sir?" Lily asked quickly. She didn't want to put herself in a position where she had to deal with an irritated Moody and Dumbledore.

"No, no," Dumbledore smiled lightly, "please continue."

Lily followed his orders. "He'll want to talk with me personally," Lily informed Moody. "Just let me take it off this one night."

With a frustrated growl, Moody ducked his head out of the fire. Then, in a roar of fire, he stepped out of the fireplace, lithe form covered in ashes. "C'mere."

Cautiously, Lily crossed the room to Moody. He grabbed her hand and waved his wand around the bracelet, muttered under his breath.

Lily was frozen as he finished the spell. One rule you learned when living with Voldemort was not make sudden movements around

paranoid wizards, especially when they already had their wand pointed at you.

“There, it’s off for the night. At dawn the spell returns.” Moody dropped her hand and limped over to Dumbledore’s desk.

“What happened?” Dumbledore exclaimed.

“...Tripped.”

Lily took a slow step backwards. “I’d better get to Charms,” she hinted.

“Thank you for stopping by,” Dumbledore said pleasantly, and then returned his gaze to Moody.

Once out of the warm office, Lily hurried down the staircase, adjusting her bookbag on her back. At the bottom, she found the statue firmly back in place. “Move!” she commanded, and then looked back up the stairs to make sure they hadn’t heard her.

“Shan’t.” The gargoyle sounded miffed. “You blew me up.”

“Well, now you’re fixed,” Lily replied.

The gargoyle pushed its back farther into the entrance. “Me left ear’s crooked now.”

“Let me leave and I’ll fix it.”

“Promise?”

“Yes.”

“Promise you promise?”

“Yes!”

“No need to get snippy,” the gargoyle moved aside. Lily slinked past him and moved down the corridor. “Hey, what about me ear?”

It was crooked to begin with, you great ugly beast! However, Lily didn't put it past the statue to tattle to the Headmaster, so she waved her wand and made the stone ear quaver and tilt up an inch.

[illegible]

Even forgoing breakfast she barely made it to Charms in time. Lily took the empty seat next to Peter Pettigrew and looked to the teacher, Professor Murphie, a tall, slim woman with kohl-lined cocoa eyes and similar skin.

"Morning," the professor greeted, sipping from a mug in her hands.

Varied greetings were drawn from the class, though Lily was silent, as usual. “How was everyone’s break? Short?” Affirmation in varying degrees of enthusiasm answered.

Murphie eyed the bleary-eyed class. “Alright, on your feet,” she said, setting down her coffee mug. Robes shuffled as the class rose. “Now, lean to the right.”

Lily did so half-heartedly. She had been up all night, unable to believe that she was back in her own bed.

Her body had not appreciated the lack of sleep, but still the Rosake Drought was seeping fierce strength into her muscles. She could feel it—it was not entirely unpleasant. Still, she knew that it was at a fragile state and that, though her magic would continue to increase, anything could knock her body down for a while.

Once this roller coaster state of the potion was over, though, she'd be unstoppable. She just had to wait.

“To the left.” Lily leaned the other way slowly.

“Now jump in a circle while patting your head and rubbing your stomach.” Lily obeyed calmly, but let her hands fall to her sides upon realizing she was the only one doing so successfully. The Marauders

on her other side had not even attempted the exercise, preferring to chat casually.

“Alright, back down,” Professor Murphie said, running a hand through her dark braids. Once the class had settled, she continued, “Now, I could bore you with a back-to-school lecture... or we could start on our next unit. What’d you say?”

“Next unit!” said Alice Prewett, eyes bright. She must have been extremely caffeinated to be so peppy on the first day back to school after Christmas.

“Alright, now, the Cutting Charm.” Her dark eyes scanned the room. “Jenna, pass out the potatoes,” she said, gesturing to a box on her desk.

This would be easy. Once Lily received her potato, she sat back in her chair. She would not draw attention to herself by finishing first. There was a quiet rustle of pages as the class turned to the number on the board.

“Er, Evans?” Pettigrew asked. Lily turned to him. Had the boys told him her secret? “Do you know what the page is?”

Lily pointed to the board. He flushed and looked back to his book. So the Marauders hadn’t revealed her secret. But how long would it take them to? Another year? Another hour?

Looking around, she saw a few people had already gotten their vegetables sliced. Lily pulled out her wand made a jerky motion over the potato, which obediently fell into small creamy cubes. “Good technique,” commented Murhpie as she strode by.

“How’d you do that?” Pettigrew sounded hopeless. His plump face was screwed tight in concentration as he poked his wand at the potato, which had turned purple.

“Ask Lupin,” Lily suggested, pulling out her Potions textbook from her bag. She looked in back for the Advile Potion. She had a feeling she would need it after the night.

Once the breathing of her roommates had slowed and evened into slumber, Lily slipped out of her bed and moved silently to her closet. After drawing out the solid black robes from the back and transfiguring a black sock into the uniform white mask, she stole out of the room.

The ubiquitous crackling fire of Hogwarts blazed in the hearth, casting flickering shadows in the Common Room. “Evans?” A head of tousled black hair turned towards her in surprise.

“Hold up!” He rose to his feet. Lily glanced up the stairs to be sure his outburst hadn’t woken anyone. The slick material of her mask chilled her hand.

"I'm finishing that Astrology essay from over the break."

“What about you?” he asked, eyes narrowed.

Lily took her hand away and gazed at him silently for a moment. “If I’m not back by three, tell anyone you’d like. Just wait until then. Don’t do anything too...stupid.”

Hazel eyes intense on her still face, Potter nodded once. "Be careful."

Lily averted her eyes and walked out, biting her tongue.

"Who's there?" asked the Fat Lady sharply. Lily, face hidden by her black hood, raised her eyebrows. "Get back to bed."

Silently, Lily cast a Memory Charm on the portrait before slinking away.

The school was silent other than the gentle creaking of the walls and the occasional snore of a painting. The caretaker's heavy footsteps could be discerned a floor below her.

Wand clasped tightly in her right hand and heart racing, Lily stepped out into the biting winter air. The night was cloudless, the infinite dark scattered by the clean light of a billion crystals. But that innocence was several light-years away and nothing but terror filled Lily.

What would happen if she ran, right now? She'd be free... Lily shook her head sharply to rid herself of the thought. She'd be hunted by both sides and that wasn't the life she wanted.

Taking a deep breath, Lily set the mask to her eyes and enchanted it not to move, then replaced her hood over her long ponytail.

The trees all but attacked her as she stepped into the forest. Tearing branches stretched to rip her. Thorns pulled her from side to side, biting her pale flesh, but Lily did not flinch. The darkness of the woods caused her to scour the trees quickly with her emerald eyes at each noise.

She finally came upon the field that was the pre-designated area for her to meet Death Eaters just out of Hogwarts' wards. Now, with all the new recruits, a small huddle of people were in the center. This she approached, making herself hold her head high and her shaking hands still.

"Ten, nine," intones a voice near the center. It was a Death Eater holding a silver chalice at the center of the people. "Eight." Lily stood at the back of the small group. "Seven." She could run. "Six." Right now. "Five." She could be free. "Four." Forever. "Three." She took a hesitant step backwards. "Two." She thrust her hand to the center and touched the bottom of the cold chalice. "One."

On a rush of color and noise, she and the rest of the group were deposited in a clearing surrounded by floating candles, all implanted in skulls.

Seemingly relaxed in a dark green throne in the center was Lord Voldemort, dark hair glinting in the faint light. As they formed a circle around him, the wizard rose languidly. "My servants," he greeted, red eyes appraising them.

"The spot you stand shall be yours, at my side forever," he murmured. He didn't have to speak any louder.

Yet Lily could see underlying worry in the motions. He was looking for her. Slowly, as though out of habit, he reached to his left arm and put his hand onto his elbow.

With a faint hiss, Lily's Mark of Salazar came to life, twisting and running down her arm. She felt suddenly compelled to speak to him, to return to his side. It was irresistible, this urge, so Lily stepped forward, out of the circle, to kneel before the Dark Lord.

His eyes widened slightly. "Go!" he commanded the rest of the group. Stunned, they did not move. "Do I have to repeat myself?" His voice was dangerously gentle.

There was a flurry to conjure Portkeys and, within a minute, the group had gone.

"My lord," she muttered, head to the grass.

The Cruciatus that hit her made her shrink to the ground, trying to draw away from the fire that raced through her body, to no avail.

The unbearable pain slowly withdrew, leaving behind a violently biting ache. "Where were you?" There was anger in voice, sharp and clipped, though desperation made him talk quickly.

"I needed a break," Lily tried to keep her voice steady. "I thought you wouldn't let me go, so I went without permission. I apologize."

"I put your sister back into her house," he said. "I found her quickly. You did not do well at hiding her."

Lily kept her voice innocent. "Pardon?" She knew he was bluffing, trying to get her to break.

He deserted this train of thought quickly. "Where were you?" he repeated, motioning for her to stand. She did so slowly, limbs on fire. "Where?"

Lily's pain-dulled mind faltered for a moment. "I-"

"Crucio!" Lily fell to the ground again. It seemed worse every time! Biting and burning! She could tell him the truth and die right now! No more pain... She should tell him! But then the pain was gone and her resolve strengthened.

"If you don't know, then you're lying!" He kept his wand focused on her still form. "The truth!"

"My lord, we were in America." She kept her head down and her mind clear.

A soft hiss came from above. "Indeed? Then why could my Mark not reach you?"

"We must have been under their wards," Lily said smoothly. "Americans are extremely paranoid."

"Why do you refer to yourself as 'we'?" Voldemort's voice was too soft.

"I was with Snape," she murmured.

The time the pain was anticipated. It flooded through her body, rendering her muscles useless with pain.

“And he did not tell me?” The Dark Lord’s voice was void of anger or anything but a manic calm. “He will die.”

“No, master, it was not his fault. I forced him not to tell you.”

“Why Snape?” The Dark Lord’s black shoes stopped next to her spilled hair.

“he figured out where I was and confronted me. He’s sharp.” Lily hoped with all her spirit that he would live. “I apologize again.”

“Velisna...” he trailed off. “I am disappointed.” Lily did not reply, focusing on breathing slowly and calmly as though she was not frightened out of her mind. “Now what about the Muggle?”

“What Muggle?” Lily asked softly.

“Your sister! Don’t play ignorant. It doesn’t suit you,” he spat.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Apparently was too calm for the Dark Lord to accept it. “I don’t want to kill you,” he murmured.

Lily let her breathing grow was ragged as it longed to. “I really don’t understand.” She kept her eyes on the short grass.

“Meet my eyes and say that,” he said.

Carefully, Lily raised her head high enough to meet his maroon eyes. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She made sure her voice was not overly fearful, nor overly confident. A dagger slipped into her brain, scouring her thoughts. She kept her shields around all rebellious thoughts.

Without warning, the presence was gone. "I have decided to take out of Hogwarts." Lily clenched her teeth to stop from crying out. "What do you say?"

"With all respect, I fear the Headmaster is already suspicious of me. If I leave, he will know for sure." Lily hoped that her argument was plausible.

The Dark Lord was silent for several minutes. Under her black robes, Lily's muscles were tense in anticipation. "You have until graduation," he concurred finally. "Not a second more."

"You are wise, my lord," Lily murmured.

"Are you implying that I am wise for taking your advice?"

"No, of course not, my lord." Lily spoke too quickly. She slowed down her words. "I meant every decision you make is wise."

"Then you with my decision that you should me married once school ends."

"Of course, my lord." Married? "May I ask who you had in mind, my lord?"

"A boy of the purest blood I could find. Lestrangle. At first, I considered breaking off Bellatrix's and Rudolphus' engagement for you, but decided Rabastan was better suited for you."

Rabastan Lestrangle. Lily contemplated letting him kill her again. "Indeed, my lord."

"Stand." Lily tried to comply. The Dark Lord, fatherly affection apparently restored, waved his wand to support her to her feet. "What's the matter?"

You just tortured me. "My lord, I did not get any sleep last night, and haven't eaten today. I apologize." With the Dark Lord, it was best to tell the truth when possible.

“You can’t have enough strength to Apparate,” he realized. He waved his wand and one of the candles floated towards them, briefly glowing blue. “Get food and sleep, Vel. We will talk later.” He patted her shoulder lightly.

“You have ten seconds. Oh, and Bellatrix told me that you’ve been talking to the Potter boy. Don’t.”

With that she was pulled away by the candle, which extinguished itself on the way to their destination.

As she landed, she realized one important thing she lacked on leaving the Dark Lord’s presence—the ability to stand.

The sharp ache of the lingering Cruciartus rang through her body. In her new position crumpled on the ground, Lily attempted to crawl forwards, to little success. How was this going to work?

Lily pulled herself to the base of a tree and put her hands on it to pull herself up. Instantly there was a flurry of movement on the upper branches as a dozen bowtruckles came swinging down, sharp claws extended.

In a flash, Lily’s wand was out, petrifying and stunning everything that moved. The forest was illuminated by the red flashes, and Lily realized that she was just outside of the school grounds. Just a few feet to crawl. This train of thought was cut off by a sharp pain in her leg.

She looked down and saw the twig-like creature clawing its way up her black pants, which was lying among the leaves. Silently, she Stunned it and it fell back, eyes glassy in unconsciousness. Lily looked around the black forest suspiciously. With her on the ground like this, any creature could kill her if they got close enough undetected.

The effort of saving her eyes from the bowtruckles had hardly affected her Rosake Drought-enhanced magic, but her body was even weaker. Pain bloomed fresh in each of her body as she pulled herself to her feet. She would not be weak.

Lily hissed softly as her body weight moved from foot to foot as she stumbled forward. Lily bit her tongue. Why did she go back? Is this the life she chose, going from suspicious group to suspicious group, with a few odd tortures thrown in?

Until He was gone, yes.

[illegible]

3:01! “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.” Black lines spread over the parchments, forming corridors and symbols. “Where is she...?”

She had sounded so sure. James had thought she would never had gone back to him... but if not, why wasn't she back?

James looked over the map again. There was movement in the Slytherin Common Room. The three Blacks, both Lestranges and Snape. But no Lily.

He raised his eyes and gazed at the fire, leaping and burning as sporadically as his thoughts.

Desperately he focused his eyes on the parchemtn again. Just as he was about to fold up the map and find McGonagall, motion on the edge of the parchment caught his eye. Every few steps the name stopped and zigzagged from side to side.

He jumped to his feet, picked his wand up off the couch, stepped forward, moved back and put on his shoes, then hurried forward. With a curse, he turned back and ran up the stairs to the boys' dormitory.

“Hey mate...” said Sirius, but James was already hurrying away, silver cloak clutched in his hand.

“Who’s there?” the Fat Lady asked as he exited. The portrait peered into the corridor suspiciously, but shrugged and resumed her conversation with a male portrait.

James hurried down the stairs, cloak fluttering at his heels, keeping one eye on the name at the edge of the map.

James reached the front doors in minutes. The name on the parchment was getting closer to the edge of the forest, still halting every few steps. James hurried through the grounds, silver cloak flying out behind him.

He did not hesitate at the entrance of the looming trees, only gathered his cloak tighter around him to keep it from hooking on the thorns. He kept his eyes focused on the map. His own dot was nearing the other. He walked to the right to intercept Lily, taking off his cloak and tucking the map into his pocket as he did so.

As the girl staggered into view, James called softly to her. “Are you okay?”

A change overcame the girl when she saw him. Her face became calm and she stood up straighter. “Of course.”

She put her chin up and stepped forward, walking steadily if slowly. James appraised her, scrutinizing every move in the dim moonlight. Her jaw was clenched and her eyes were wider than normal.

As she neared him, she stumbled and fell. James rushed forward and caught her around the waist. “You call that okay?” he murmured into her hair.

“I tripped over a root.”

James scanned the leafy ground and found no sign of said root, but decided to drop it. She would find a different excuse.

He kept one arm around her waist as he led her out of the forest. James wasn’t sure whether she even noticed—if she did, or was offended by it, it didn’t show.

Though brambles tried to hinder their progress by pulling at their clothes, James was quick to detach them.

They walked mostly in silence through the dark forest, listening to the creatures of the night, absorbed in their thoughts. The boy kept his steps small and slow for her, careful not to throw her off balance with his movements.

“Here,” James said at the edge of the forest. Keeping his right arm around her, he swept the Invisibility Cloak over them. “Covered?”

Her nod was shockingly timid. She was leaning into him, steps slower than before. He was dying to ask what had happened, but felt that she wouldn’t answer anyways.

Their coverage of the grounds was at a snail’s pace, each step careful. Continually, James glanced at Lily. Sometimes when he thought of her, usually so strong and solid, he forgot how fragile she really was.

James did not remove his arm as he opened the front doors and led Lily into the castle. The halls were harshly silent compared to the chill outdoors.

That’s why James’ heart nearly skipped a beat when Professor McGonagall, in her cat form, appeared at the entrance to the second floor corridor they were on.

The first thing he did was pull Lily closer to him under the cloak. The second was the thought, Cats can see through cloaks, followed by a word that would have made his mother wash out his mouth.

Lily took an automatic step backwards. James pulled her behind a suit of armor quickly. The faint sound of movement at the end of the hallway made James hold his breath. When no more noises followed, he relaxed and became hyperaware of how close Lily was. She as so beautiful...

But concern for the girl snapped him out of his thoughts. She was paler than usual and the slight tremble in her limbs caused him to murmur, “You okay?”

“Yes.” Her voice was almost too soft to hear. “Let’s go.”

James helped her back out into the corridor and up to the Gryffindor Tower. When they finally entered the Common Room, the clock read 4:27. “You. Sleep. Now,” James instructed.

She shook her head. “I have to do those essays.”

“Not going to happen,” James declared. “You’re exhausted. I’m sure you can get Dumbledore to work something out with your teachers.”

She looked ready to argue, so James pulled her over to the couch by the fire. She melted into the warm leather, not worrying about pretenses.

“Could you even make it up the stairs?” Lily looked at the floor, avoiding his attempts to catch her eye. He sighed. “Lily...” The girl kept her gaze firmly on the ground. “Where were you?” There was a tightening in her face that put James on his guard. “Lily?”

“I thought that was obvious,” she muttered. James wished she would look at him.

He pondered for a minute on her words. “You’re having an affair with Snape, aren’t you,” James said dully. “I knew it.”

That got her attention. Her eyes met his and she murmured, “Please tell me you’re not serious. And don’t even think about using The Pun.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” James replied with a grin. “And, yeah, I was kidding. I know where you went.”

Her eyes, which had lit up for that second, turned dark again. “Then why are you talking to me?”

“It’s not like you wanted to go.” She looked surprised at his words, eyes widening. “I’m sorry,” he said.

“It’s not your fault,” she murmured.

James wasn't sure what the right response to that was, so he settled for another apology.

“Potter...” She shook her head softly.

He looked over her frail form with a careful eye. They were having a real (almost) conversation—she must have been in a lot of pain. “What did he do?”

His words were more to himself than he, but she replied anyways. "The usual. I've had worse."

“That’s not a good thing,” James argued with the calm inflection in her voice. “You shouldn’t go anymore. If you don’t want to, don’t.”

"It's not that simple." Her voice was lifeless. "You know that."

He did. “I still don’t think anyone should have to do something they don’t want to.”

“Drop it.”

"It's already five. Class is in three hours. Think you can stand up yet?"

She nodded once and rose to her feet. She looked steady enough. "Now go sleep," he instructed.

He watched her steps carefully, scrutinizing for the smallest stumble, but she made it to the staircase without trouble. James watched for a few more minutes to make sure she didn't fall down the stairs, barely feeling the fire's warmth heating his back. Then he rose and stumbled to his own dorm to get in some sleep before class.

[illegible]

Why was it that every time she'd woken up lately it had been to intense pain? Lily cautiously opened her eyes to see what had woken her up.

Pale sunlight had fallen through a crack in her bed hangings, making a silvery gold line across her scarlet comforter up to her face. She blinked against the light. What time was it...?

Lily threw off her covers, ignoring the pain in her body and looked at Jessica's alarm clock. It was already noon!

Second day back in class and she had missed her first three classes! Containing her panic, Lily pulled on her robes, put her hair into a ponytail and spelled the bags under eyes away; she didn't want anyone noticing there was something wrong.

Lily slung her bag over her shoulder and walked down to the Common Room. Seated by the fireplace were a few sixth and seventh years on their free periods, including Pettigrew, Black and two of the Js.

As Lily hurried past, focused solely on not limping, Black noticed her. “Lily? Aren’t you in James’ Potions class now?”

“Oh, we didn’t want to wake her up,” Jessica informed him lightly. “We agreed she needed some beauty sleep, right, girls?” Lily’s other two roommates giggled.

Black looked surprised at her words. “You did what?”

“God, honey, you’re so cute when you’re confused,” she said, poking his straight nose.

Ignoring the picayune girls, Lily walked out the door towards Slughorn's dungeon.

[illegible]

Lily slinked into the classroom as the bell rang, scouring it with her eyes. “Lily! I was worried you’d dropped my class!” Slughorn said, laughing at his own joke.

"I just overslept," she murmured. There were two open seats in the classroom. Potter patted the one next to him, but the Dark Lord's warning rang in her mind.

"Oh, hello Lily darling," Bellatrix drawled as the pale girl perched on the stool beside her. "How'd you sleep?" There was a wicked glint in her dark blue eyes.

"Wonderfully. You?" she replied as Slughorn wrote some instructions on the blackboard.

"I'm amazed that you could, considering..." Bellatrix lowered her voice companionably. "You know."

"No, I don't," Lily muttered, chopping the gillyweed. If Bellatrix wouldn't say it, then neither would she.

"Oh, come on Lily," she purred. The potion called for rat liver next, so Bellatrix transfigured a beozar into a small white rat. It scurried around the table until her knife ended its life. "We both know He isn't happy with you." Casually, Bellatrix cut open the dead rodent, speared the liver with her knife and dropped into the cauldron. "I'm just trying to help." With a wave of her wand, the body was gone.

Lily calmly used her wand to clean some of the blood that had splattered onto her Potions' kit. "Thank you for your concern, Bellatrix, but I'm still unsure what you mean."

The Slytherin shrugged, wiped off her gold dagger, and began slicing the butterfly wings. The methodic motion of the metal slicing up innocence made Lily suppress a shudder. "I thought you'd be dead by now," Bellatrix confided in Lily, scraping the butterflies into the fiery cauldron.

"Well, I'm not." Lily stirred the potion thrice counterclockwise, barely avoiding being splashed by the temperamental potion. "As you can see, I'm perfectly fine."

"You should be finishing up now," called Slughorn. Lily could hardly see him through the smoke in the dungeon. While looked towards

him, she caught Potter staring at her, worry clearly shining in his hazel eyes, which were discernable even through the haze. (1) Haze is symbolic for confusion and death, as you may be able to tell (1)

Lily checked the board. They needed to add four nightshade berries to the cauldron to turn it green. Lily reached into her kit, pulled out a quartet of scarlet berries and carefully dropped them in. "Now we wait for three quarters of a minutes to stir eight times clockwise," Lily read out.

Bellatrix nodded. Her face was lit eerily by the acidic green potion. "So, where were you over the break?"

"We've been over this, Bellatrix." Lily kept her voice calm and flat. Her eyes drifted to the dagger still resting in Bellatrix's hand. "That is for Him to know." She began stirring the potion.

"Do you ever doubt the cause?" she asked suddenly. "If you do, you can tell me."

And let you murder me? Not likely. "Of course I do not have doubts. My loyalty is greater than yours could ever be."

"Mmhmm," Bellatrix said lazily, looking unconcerned.

"Bring me your potion," called Slughorn. "I don't care if you haven't finished, Mr. Snape."

The Slytherin in question glowered. "I was trying a better way."

"I'm sure you were," Slughorn said airily.

Severus met Slughorn's eyes and dropped a lacewing fly into the potion. In a flash of light, it was acidic green. "And mine only takes four minutes," he sneered.

Slughorn puffed up. "Then what were you doing the rest of my class?"

"Well, I tried your way first," Severus smirked, "and then I made it better."

The bell rang over their argument. Lily took up a flask of their potion and set it on Slughorn's desk. "Nice," she whispered to Severus as he passed.

She moved back to retrieve her bag from her work station. Bellatrix had disappeared. Lily waved her wand at the cauldron to clean out its contents and hurried to lunch.

[illegible]

So, like the idea of reviews are equivalent to a half page? Let me know. If more people vote yes than no I'll do it again next time.

James spotted her the moment she entered the Great Hall, red hair glistening in the sun. She was as pale as she'd been in the previous period, just as dull-eyed.

He gestured for her to join him and his friends, but she sat at the end of the table, as before. He wondered why. Was she sticking near the exit, or was she avoiding him?

"Have you finished your Charms homework for tomorrow?" asked Peter as he sat down.

James pulled his eyes away from the girl and said, "Yeah, go ahead." He took out his notebook and drew out the homework.

Peter took it from him and began avidly copying down answers.

"You know you'll fail the test if you do that," Remus reprimanded.

Peter looked up. "But I don't get it."

"That's my point. I can tutor you, then you will get it, and pass," Remus explained.

Peter's face lit up. "Tonight?"

Remus faltered. "Uh, actually, Pete, I have that guidance thing tonight. We can still do it tom—no wait, I have patrol. We can practice on Thursday night."

"But the test is on Thursday," Peter mumbled.

"Did you see Lily today?" James asked Remus.

"She wasn't in Herbology or Arithmacy," the lycan said, looking thoughtful as he bit into his turkey croissant. "She came in during Potions, right?"

"Yeah." James looked over at her again.

"I know what happened," said Sirius darkly as he settled between Remus and Peter.

“Is she okay?” James asked quietly.

“Jessica turned off her alarm,” scowled Sirius.

Remus frowned. “Why?”

"I don't know and I don't care." Sirius bit savagely into a chicken leg. "Igou'er," he said through the bite.

“What?” James asked.

Sirius swallowed and repeated quietly, "I broke up with her."

“Sorry, mate,” James sympathized, though he knew that their relationship had been off and on for a while.

Sirius laughed roughly. “She’s telling everyone that she broke up with me because of...” He gestured to his new blonde hair.

“Weren’t you going to ask Murphie to fix it?” Remus asked hurriedly, face tinged pink. It had been his spell that had caused the change.

“She said it’d be good for me to look up the spell myself,” he grumbled. “But I dunno. Blondes have more fun anyways, right?”

[illegible]

“We gotta talk,” James said into Lily’s ear, grabbing her arm and pulling her into an empty classroom.

"I have to get to class," she protested softly.

"You have a free period now," James replied. "I know your scheldule."

"Stalker," she muttered. She crossed her arms. "What?"

“Well, I...” James thought back. He had his speech memorized... if only he could remember it. “I was just wondering where you were and I was really worried and think you should tell me what happened now so I don’t have a nervous breakdown!”

Lily blinked. “Alright. Once more, slowly.”

“I was just getting kind of worried. What happened?”

“We shouldn’t be talking.” Lily waved her wand and made the walls glow blue for a second. She said, “He told me not to talk to you.”

“He did?” James gave a strangled laugh. “I didn’t even know he knew my name.”

“This isn’t funny.”

James straightened his back and nodded. “Nervous reaction. Go on.”

“He just asked where I’d been.” Lily met his eyes. They were so truthful James knew she was lying.

“I suppose he invited you to his birthday party next weekend, too,” James retorted.

“It’s at eight. I’m in charge of bringing the lemonade and a dessert,” Lily replied.

James frowned and searched her face. “Really?”

“Of course.”

James blinked. “You’re kidding.”

Lily headed for the door. “You are so stupid. I’m not supposed to talk to you.”

James called after her, “We really can help you.”

“Don’t bother trying,” she said over her shoulder as she left.

“Just kind of poke at it. You’ve got to really want to make it work though,” Bellatrix leaned over the chair, watching him closely.

Peter looked at the potatoe he was trying to slice. “Uh, sectumsempra!”

“Please, Pettigrew! Put some passion into it!” Bellatrix cried.

Peter flushed dark red. He wanted so badly to impress this girl. “Sectumsempra!” he cried. A rush went through Peter’s body.

The potato split into three small sections. Then the table fell apart. Peter realized that he was panting. Bellatrix stood against the chair, a wild grin on her face. “Perfect,” she purred.

Remember, the reviews I get for this chapter will add with the ones from last chapter for your super-huge chapter next week, because this, again, it actually an addition to Meetings.

“Partner up,” called Professor Williams, clapping his hands. “Dueling day!”

Severus smirked and flicked his eyes towards Lily. She did not meet his eyes, again. He wondered once more what Voldemort could have said to make her so averse to speaking to him. Or maybe, whispered a voice in his head, she just hates you.

Severus kept still in his seat while everyone else scurried around. “Snape,” said Rudolphus casually, “you’re my partner.” Severus shrugged, stood up and, with a wave of his wand, moved his desk to the back corner with the other desks.

“Try to use spells you haven’t used for a while,” Professor Williams called over the chatting students. “Everyone ready? Okay. Listen, class, I have to grade some papers, so I’ll be in my office until class ends, so if you need me... Anyways, three, two, use fair spells, one, go!”

Severus created a bright blue shield to encompass his entire body and sneered at the weak spells Rudolphus was throwing at him. He leaned against the solid back of his shield, taunting Rudolphus.

“Snape!” Rudolphus shouted in between spells, “Take, expelliarmus, it like a, levicorpus, man!”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Levicorpus is a non-verbal spell,” he informed Rudolphus calmly. Rudolphus was turning purple. “Try not to use spells you don’t know how to use,” Quickly Severus undid his shield and pointed his wand at Rudolphus, simultaneously flipping him up into the air and disarming him. He continued lazily, “or that give me ideas.”

As Rudolphus bellowed obscenities, Severus saw Lily locked in a duel with Bellatrix. Bellatrix was saying something to Lily that couldn’t be heard over the rest of class and Lily’s eyes were hardening with every word. Severus took a step towards them but then, suddenly, Rudolphus fell to the ground behind him with a loud thud.

Severus turned but Rudolphus had already caught up his wand and shouted, “Beratanum!”

Severus barely got his shield up in time. Then, the shield shattered, shards of blue magic exploding outwards. The force of the blast sent Rudolphus across the room into the wall. The class in general was oblivious to Rudolphus’ lack of consciousness, as they were all absorbed in their own duels.

Severus headed swiftly in the direction of Lily and Bellatrix, whose spells were flying heatedly.

There was a flash of red light from Lily’s wand, but Severus only managed two running steps before he heard a voice behind him shout, “Sectumsemptra!”

Severus whirled around to see Lupin falling backwards, his robes dark with fresh blood. Severus reached Lupin at the same time that Pettigrew, his dueling partner, did. “Oh Merlin...” Pettigrew murmured, face paler than a ghost.

Without hesitation Severus waved his wand over Lupin’s body, muttering the counter-curse. “What did I do?” Pettigrew asked softly.

Once the spell was complete, Severus turned to Pettigrew. “Where did you learn that?” he hissed, grabbing the front of the Gryffindor’s robes.

“I... I—” Pettigrew stuttered, coloring.

“Where?” Severus repeated.

“What the... Remus!” Black’s voice rang over the room. The dueling class, who before had not noticed Remus, now turned and gasped. “Remus?” Black yelled.

Potter and Black raced to Lupin’s side. The skin under his torn robes was covered in blood, but was healed over with jagged scars. “What did you do to him?” Black shouted.

Upon finding the question addressed to himself, Severus rolled his eyes. "I didn't do it, you great idiot!"

"Yes he did!" Pettigrew stammered. "Me and Remus were just dueling when Snape showed up and..." he gestured to Lupin, whose eyes slowly blinked open.

"What...?" Lupin mumbled. He looked down and saw the pool of blood he was lying in. "Oh," he said and passed out.

"You—"

"Sirius!" Potter interrupted. "We have to get him to the Hospital Wing! You lot, move back!" The class, who had been clustered around them, hurried back.

"We'll settle this later," Black told Severus, then hurried to conjure a small bed. "Put him on here—Carefully, Peter!"

As the Marauders levitated their friend off the ground, the door opened and Professor Williams stepped into the classroom. "Let's see how—Crap." His dark eyes ran over the bright blood on the floor to Lupin's pale body.

He turned and bolted from the classroom. His shouts of "Minerva! Albus! Anybody! Help!" echoed through the empty classroom.

Black, Potter and Pettigrew accompanied the bed out of the classroom, none of the other students daring to offer assistance.

Severus scanned the classroom. Rudolphus was now standing unsteadily at the back of the classroom and Bellatrix was prone on the floor at Lily's feet.

Severus swooped over to her, not bothering to offer guidance to the rest of the class. "All right, everybody," called Alice Prewett, a Gryffindor, get in your desks and have a seat. Dumbledore's coming."

Ignoring her, Severus reached Lily, who was frozen in front of Bellatrix. "Lily!" Severus murmured.

She jumped slightly and faced him. Her eyes were distant. "Severus?"

"Lily, you need to undo the spell," he encouraged. If anyone else tried to take of the Stunner they would all know... "Hurry, Lily." Something was wrong, he realized. Her eyes were clouded and her face was unusually flushed. "Lily?" he repeated.

She blinked slowly. "Severus?"

"Yes, it's me. What's wrong?"

Her head moved slightly to meet his eyes. "Wait, huh? Severus?"

"Lily," Severus said louder, fighting not to panic. The other students, who were sitting now, turned to look at the only two standing students.

"I..." she whispered. Her eyes closed and she crumpled to the floor.

The class immediately broke out into hushed whispers.

"Silence!" The class fell silent, watching Dumbledore enter the room, Professor O'Sykes on his heels. "Now," he continued in a much calmer voice, "due to the events of today, your class is dismissed. However," he said over the outbreak of excited muttering, "I need to see anyone who saw what happened to Mister Lupin. Also, Madame Pomfrey will be available to anyone hit by an untimely spell. Thank you."

The class slowly emptied out, leaving only Severus and the still figures of Bellatrix and Lily. As Rudophus passed, he growled, "This isn't over."

"Get in line," Severus said, nodding calmly, not looking at Dumbledore. The Slytherin glowered at him and stalked out the door.

When the class was gone, Dumbledore said resignedly, "Mister Snape."

“Wha’ ‘appened to these two?” Professor O’Sykes asked.

Severus shrugged. Dumbledore turned to the Care of Magical Creatures professor. “Would you mind checking on Madame Pomfrey. By the state of this classroom, I fear she’ll need some assistance.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the teacher as he strode out.

“Now, what happened to these two?” Dumbledore repeated O’Sykes’ question.

Severus looked down at the two girls. Telling on one would be telling on the other, but Dumbledore would have to fix Bellatrix so she could help Lily. “Bellatrix got Stunned. I don’t know what happened to Lily.”

“Would you assist Miss Evans to the Hospital Wing while I take care of Miss Black?” Dumbledore did not wait for an answer, kneeling quickly beside Bellatrix. The Slytherin was breathing deeply and looked more peaceful than Severus had ever seen her before.

Quickly, Severus conjured a stretcher and then levitated Lily on to it, using his wand to prevent her from falling off.

“Ennerverate,” Dumbledore said as Severus headed for the door. “Ennerverate,” he repeated louder. Severus quickly led Lily’s stretcher out of the door.

[illegible]

“Is he okay?” James asked Madame Pomfrey when she came out from behind the white curtains.

“He lost a bit of blood, but his cuts are already healed,” the nurse replied, stowing a vial of dark purple potion into a large cabinet on the sharply white wall.

“What happened to him?” whispered Peter, round face pale. He had never been so good with blood.

"I'm... not sure," she paused and rubbed her hands on her white apron, "But he's all right. Did any of you hear what spell hit him? Even a syllable from it could help."

"Peter was there," Sirius said. He turned to Peter. "Did you hear what it was?"

"Madame Pomfrey!" The nurse turned. Snape had just entered the room with a figure on a stretcher. He caught sight of the Marauders and his step faltered, but he continued forward. "We're not sure what hit her," Snape explained.

James caught sight of blood-red hair on the stretcher. "Lily?" he exclaimed in horror. (1)

Madame Pomfrey bustled forward, pulling her wand out of her apron. She put a hand to Lily's forehead and frowned. "She's burning up." She looked at Snape. "You say this is a curse?"

Snape nodded. "I didn't hear it, but I think so. She wasn't sick earlier... I think," he added on quickly.

"Who was she dueling with?" James burst out.

Snape ignored him. "Dumbledore made me bring her up, so if you have it under control..."

"Yes, yes, you can go," Madame Pomfrey said distractedly, already murmuring a spell over her looked once more at Lily, and then swept from the room, avoiding the Marauders' eyes.

James looked over Lily worriedly. Her pale face and neck were flushed like roses crushed on fresh snow. Her breaths came in short gasps and she fidgeted restlessly, her eyes beneath her closed eyelids moving rapidly.

Madame Pomfrey moved Lily to the bed across from Remus, conjured white curtains around it and entered.

“Kingsley?” Dumbledore chuckled. “Can you imagine him in a room with a dozen first years?”

Edgar smiled. "Not without laughing." He sobered, "You know that Lily will think it's all because of her."

"It's quite possible she'll never know," Dumbledore said softly.

Edgar paled. “What happened?”

Dumbledore stopped pacing and met Edgar's eyes. "I don't know."

[illegible]

Lily was riding on the back of a giant jaguar. Gargantuan trees enclosed her and the jungle heat stuck to her oppressively. The big cat beneath her moved fluidly but it was still making her dizzy. Looking up, she found the oddest creatures in the treetops.

“Lily?”

Lily giggled. The creatures looked so funny. Wait, what was that voice?

“Lily, are you awake?”

It must have been God. Lily felt obligated to answer; he had, after all, created the world. “The cows are in the trees,” she informed him with a laugh, gesturing wildly towards the out-of-place farm animals.

There was something on her forehead. Lily brushed it away, worried it was some Amazonian mutated spider.

“She’s burning up,” said God. Lily attempted to stop the jaguar—it was really making her dizzy now—but it wouldn’t listen to her. The heat of the jungle was near unbearable now.

“What’s wrong with her?” asked God.

“We’re not sure,” said a female voice. She didn’t know who that was. Maybe it was Athena or someone.

“Have you seen anything like this before?” asked God.

The jaguar stumbled over a fallen tree and the jungle heat overwhelmed her in a rush and then everything was black.

[illegible]

James looked at the clock, then glanced at the Marauders' Map. Madame Pomfrey was heading towards the school now.

Sirius peered over his shoulder, newly flaxen hair gleaming in the firelight. "We should go now," he muttered.

James nodded and picked his Invisibility Cloak off the couch, gesturing towards Peter to join them.

"You don't think it'll mess up his healing, do you?" Peter asked quietly.

"Course not," Sirius assured him, though his silver eyes were worried, "Madame Pomfrey said the scars were fully healed."

“Padfoot’s right,” James said, ruffling Peter’s hair affectionately. He glanced back at the Map. “All right, let’s go.”

They arranged the silvery cloak over themselves, careful not to leave any limbs showing. Once they were ready, the Marauders walked steadily to the portrait hole and opened it.

“Hello?” asked the Fat Lady suspiciously. Peter closed the portrait carefully, leaving a crack so they could reenter without giving a password.

James walked slowly, keeping an eye on the Map. “Madame Pomfrey’s on this floor,” he muttered.

He watched her dot closely and sighed when she was out of range. "McGonagall's on patrol in the fifth floor corridor," he read off. "Here, let's take this passage," he instructed, gesturing to the portrait of Addison the Mathmagician of 1307.

"Lumos," James muttered as they entered the hidden stairwell. The staircase was small, so they lined up, single file, to walk down.

James, in front, was careful not to speed up as they hurried down. The pale wandlight gave each stone in the wall and steps an eerie shadow.

"Watch the next stair," James reminded Sirius.

There was a sudden yelp and James whirled to see the hapless Peter stuck in the trick stair. "Sirius!" James groaned exasperatedly, "Why didn't you warn him?"

James and Sirius bent down and pulled Peter out of the step. Sirius shrugged once Peter was on his feet. "You didn't say 'pass it on.'"

James rolled his eyes and threw the cloak back on. "Hurry up."

They made it the rest of the way out of the castle without mishap other than James tripping over his own shoelaces.

The grounds were covered in a fine snow powder, giving the air a sharp clean bite. James stowed the Invisibility Cloak and the Map behind a well-trimmed holly bush and said, "Go."

He closed his eyes and imagined himself growing. Sharp antlers emerged painfully from his head as his body elongated and morphed. He shivered as fur grew at an accelerated rate over his whole body and his robes disappeared.

James fell to all fours, and looked towards his companions. Peter was a small rat, sitting on the edge of the stone castle step. He squeaked, affirming his morph had been successful. Sirius morphed quickly and James snorted a laugh, breath crystallizing before his muzzle.

Sirius cocked his head, looked down and jumped back up into his human form. “No way I’m running around looking like a freaking golden retriever!” he exclaimed.

James shrugged his shoulders and nodded for Peter to climb onto his back. Together they galloped to the Whomping Willow, leaving Sirius standing stubbornly by the castle, shivering in the cold air.

As James and Peter neared the violent tree, a mournful howl rent the air, sending shivers down James’ spine.

Peter leaped off James’ back, scurried under the flailing branches of the Whomping Willow and pressed a knot on the rough bark with both small paws. The tree’s motion stopped, allowing James to go underneath the thick branches. He looked back up at Sirius, who was a stubborn silhouette beside the school. He bowed his antlers and entered the tunnel.

Peter was darting back and forth along the hallway, steadily heading towards Remus’ room. Being a rat made Peter even more scatterbrained. James’ eyes adjusted to the dark quickly, absorbing what little of the full moon’s light entered.

Another howl rang loud, ripping the air with misery and loneliness. James cantered forward to Remus’ room, hurrying to accompany him in his pain.

James ducked through the doorway, and entered the room, antlers brushing the low ceiling. A small chair crashed into the wall behind him, breaking apart.

Remus was hunched in the center of the room, bloodshot amber eyes wildly looking around. Short gray hair covered his lithe body and the torn remains of his undershirt hung from his shoulders.

James took a tentative step forward, careful to avoid hitting his black hoofs on the shards of broken glass that littered the floor. As speech was impossible in animal form, James tried to meet Remus’ eyes to ask him whether or not he was in a human mood.

Remus looked into James' eyes, ears slowly perking forward. Then, with a carnal snarl tearing from his throat, the werewolf leapt forward. James jumped backwards, the lycan's jaws snapping closed centimeters from his foreleg.

James lowered his sharp antlers defensively, heart racing. He had been hoping Remus would recognize him tonight. Without Sirius here, James didn't know whether he could hold Remus down.

Peter entered the room at last, squeaking triumphantly. It was often difficult for the rat to scale the two stairs that led to the room's entrance.

Remus gave a short bark and jumped at James again. James stumbled backwards, thin legs quaking.

Peter squeaked and there was a scrabble as he raced back out of the room. The noise distracted James and one of his back hoofs slipped on a chunk of clear glass and James fell backwards onto the glass-littered wooden floor. Saliva dripped from the werewolf's jaws and his pupils grew. The scent of blood was in the air now.

Remus leapt for the fallen stag, but a flash of gold collided with his chest, knocking him back into the tattered twin mattress. James used the opportunity to roll back onto his hoofs and stand shakily.

Sirius moved back to stand defensively in front of James, lip raised in a growl to show his sharp white teeth. A rush of vertigo swept over James as he felt something warm slid down his side from the stinging cuts on his back. He readjusted his stance unsteadily, watching Remus warily.

The lycanthrope rose from the floor, meeting Sirius growl for growl. Remus rose to his feet, head brushing the ceiling though he was still slightly crouched. He gave an intimidating series of barks, ears pulled back and eyes dark.

When Sirius did not back down, Remus took a step closer, hackles raised. Sirius met that with his own step forward, chest puffed out and

golden fur on end. With apparent canine instinct, the two leapt at each other at once. Sirius, as the smaller one, was able to bite Remus' heels, causing him to fall onto all fours. Remus twisted around, sharp yellow teeth aimed for Sirius' throat.

Then the werewolf reared back, howling, this time in pain. Peter was biting into Remus' shoulder, having jumped there from the top of the bed. Remus shook himself, but Peter held on tighter. Remus dropped to his back, trying to roll and squish the rat. Sirius bit at Remus' bared stomach to scare him into standing back up.

Peter jumped off the lycan and scurried across the floor to stand beside James' hoof. James blinked quickly, blood loss making him unsteady simply standing. Peter put his paw on James' foot, giving a worried squeak.

James did not reply as at that moment Sirius and Remus met in midair again, snarling. There was a loud yelp and Remus fell back, foreleg bleeding heavily. Sirius spat sideways and walked over to Remus, stiff-legged. Remus wagged his tail and whimpered, rolling over on his back. James was thankful that Remus had never been an overly dominant wolf and easily forfeited each time.

Sirius, accepting Remus' surrender, and hurried to James' side, giving a small whimper of worry. James nodded slowly, though his head was spinning. He looked cautiously at Remus, and then knelt to his knees, showing Sirius his cuts.

The golden dog growled softly under his breath and hung his head. James shrugged and got awkwardly back to his feet.

Remus stood up slowly also, tail between his legs and approached them. Suddenly his ears perked up and he cocked his head, breathing deeply. His eyes flared with sudden recognition and James gave a sigh of relief. The worst of the night was over.

[illegible]

"The wedding's this summer," he told her.

Severus stood, watching warily. Why was Bones at Hogwarts?

Anyway, Severus wasn't anxious to talk to him. However, it seemed like he was going to anyways when Bones called, "Mister Snape?"

Severus walked towards them. "I'll talk to you later, Rachel," Bones said, nodding to the librarian.

"I want to hear all about this girl, y'hear?" she said.

Bones turned to Severus. "Let's talk in my office."

Not bothering to ask the questions that burned his tongue, Severus followed Bones out of the library.

The windows they passed were dusted in ice, creating a swirling image. The grounds outside were covered in snow and the other students were enjoying their weekend by engaging in snow fights.

"Classes good?" Bones asked casually as they turned yet another corner.

"Yes."

"Are you ever grammatically incorrect?"

Severus furrowed his eyebrows. Was Bones teasing him? Unsure what the correct response was, Severus kept quiet.

Severus was thoroughly confused as they entered Professor Williams' office. Were they taking the Floo to the Ministry?

"Sorry, I haven't gotten around to unpacking," Bones said, gesturing to large boxes around the room. "What do you think?" he asked, grinning at Severus' bewildered look. "Professor Bones."

"You're taking over Williams' job?" Severus finally asked.

"Yep. Aren't you excited? A whole semester with me! Don't answer that," he added, laughing.

"So you're not here because of..."

"Of what, you? Lily? Naw, I'm in for the people calling me Professor. Professor Bones. Rolls off the tongue, eh?" Bones sat behind his desk and gestured for Severus to sit across from him.

"Still," he continued, "I am curious as to what happened to her."

"Pardon?" Severus asked. Who? When?

"Dumbledore just took me to see Lily," Bones explained.

"Is she doing better?" Severus asked. "I'd be surprised, with that tyro taking care of her," he said bitterly.

"Ha, I actually know what that means," Bones said. "And no, she's not."

"Is she even awake?"

"Oh yes. Awake enough to tell me about cows in the trees, or something," Bones said. "What got her?"

"A spell."

Bones rolled his eyes. "Thank you, Snape. Which spell got her? You're the expert."

So all of Bones' newfound jocularly was to get him to give information he didn't know? "I believe it is Italian, or possibly Greek," Severus revealed.

"That's...helpful," Bones said. "Would you like some tea?" he asked as a kettle began whistling.

Severus shrugged. Bones rose and poured tea into two white mugs. The one that proclaimed, "I need caffeine," in flashing red he kept for himself and gave the other one to Severus.

The sharp tea burned his tongue, but he ignored it. "No sugar? That's hardcore," Bones said.

Severus kept his face still. "I like black tea."

"Why am I not surprised?" Bones asked, drinking some of his own tea.

"Because you think I'm evil," Severus replied. What..? Severus carefully set down his mug and looked at Bones in disbelief. After so many magicless interrogations, he was suddenly slipping Veritaserum into tea?

Severus calmly evaluated the situation. The fact that he could meant both that the Veritaserum's calming affects were already in effect and that it was a very small amount, probably a drop, to stop him from detecting it previously.

Bones leaned forward, eyes bright. "Now, who cursed Lily?"

"Bellatrix Black." Severus wondered why Bones thought he needed Veritaserum to answer that. He felt very relaxed. "Why?"

"Then we can ask her. But wait, she's still Stunned, right?"

"Yes."

Bones narrowed his eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Something's the matter with you."

"The Veritaserum's making me very relaxed."

"What?" Bones' voice was surprisingly sharp. "What Veritaserum?"

“The one in the tea.”

Bones pulled out his wand and cast a spell. Both mugs glowed brown for a second. He growled. “Leave it to Walter to put Veritaserum in his tea bags. Probably used it to see if students were cheating.”

Severus began humming.

“This is great. Now I have two loony Death Eaters to handle. At least yours’ll wear off. Gone yet?”

“Nope,” Severus answered.

“Wait a second,” Bones said, watching Severus through narrowed hazel eyes. “Did you put it in there?”

“No. That’s a silly question.” Had he just said that or did he just imagine himself saying it. He repeated it just to be sure.

“But you could probably detect it right away. Did you think I’d done it?” he asked, appalled.

“Yes.”

“Once this potion wears off you’re never going to trust me again, are you?” Bones muttered, rubbing his temples.

“Correct.”

“Why won’t you just trust me?” he sighed.

“I give what I’m given,” Severus replied. Then the relaxed daze was gone and Severus quickly rebuilt the stone wall around his thoughts. “I’ll see you in class Tuesday,” Severus spat.

“Bye.”

Once Severus got outside the door he let out a long shuddering breath. Then he cleared his mind and walked away.

James smiled. Despite his faults, Peter was a great friend—he'd been more worried about Remus than Remus himself.

As they walked downstairs, they were nearly run over by Tonks. “Is Lily okay?” she asked when she saw them.

“Thanks, I’m fine,” muttered Remus.

Tonks sighed exaggeratedly. “So how are you, Remus?”

“Well, now that you mention it--”

“What happened to her?” Tonks interrupted, looking from Sirius to James, the two she assumed would know.

“No one knows,” Sirius offered. “At least she got Bella dearest before she went under.”

“Bellatrix?” Tonks’ hair darkened slightly as her expression clouded.
“She did it?”

James looked around. The other students were all outside, so James led her to the fireplace. "They're trying to keep it quiet, but he told us because we're in the Order and all. Bellatrix used some Dark spell on Lily and then Lily Stunned her. She's not waking up."

“Which one?” asked Tonks, pale.

“Both. Not even Dumbledore can wake them up.”

Tonks sighed. “What can we do?”

Sirius stood up from the couch. “Well, I know what I’m going to do.” He grinned. “Turn Bella in to the Aurors.”

“No!” Remus exclaimed. “If the Ministry gets Bellatrix, they’ll get Lily.”

[illegible]

“Ew,” Lily murmured. “No, stop it,” she said, batting away the cup. Nasty, gross, despicable, vile thing!

“You need to-”

“No!”

The panda bear looked down over her glasses. “You need this to get better.”

Suddenly they were out of the jungle and in the middle of a strange penguin ritual dance. “Cold...” Lily muttered, looking around at all the snow.

The warrior penguins looked at her briefly but continued dancing. “Stop it!” she pleaded. “You’re making me dizzy!”

The panda looked at her in concern. “What did I do?”

Lily rolled her eyes. “Not you. The penguins.”

The cup was shoved in her face again. “Gross, no!” Lily spat. “Go away, you stupid panda!”

The cup was quickly withdrawn, the panda looked affronted. “She’s still hallucinating,” the panda told a giant white leopard seal that appeared beside them. “She won’t drink the potion.”

The speed of the war dance increased. “Make them stop dancing,” Lily whimpered, holding her head in her hands.

“Who?” asked the leopard seal.

“The penguins,” Lily repeated, frustrated. “Are you blind?”

“Not that I am aware of,” the seal replied, chuckling, showing off bright white teeth.

“Are you two going to eat me?” Lily inquired.

Suddenly Lily was floating alone in a freezing black void. There was a sudden pressure on her left arm. Lily looked down and saw a green

and silver snake wrapping its way along her arm. "Oh, hello," she greeted.

"Velisna..." it hissed. Now wrapped around her waist, it raised its head to meet her eyes. "I know what you have been doing," it said.

"How?" Lily asked. A small part of her mind told her to be worried. She shrugged. What was so strange about floating in space talking to a ten foot long snake?

"I've been with you," it explained patiently, eyes dilating to focus on her face.

"Oh, tattoo! You've grown!" she said, delighted.

It gave a serpentine smile. "Only to you." Its tongue flicked from its mouth. "The Master is worried about you, Velisna."

For the first time fear entered Lily. "The Dark Lord?"

"Of course not, silly snakeling. Riddle does not even know you are hurt. Master Slytherin," it hissed.

"Is he mad at me?" Lily asked. "For working against Him?"

"You do not work against Master Slytherin. Only Riddle."

"My brain hurts," Lily moaned.

"Listen, snakeling. Master Slytherin may not love Muggles, but he doesn't want them dead. He understands their importance in the world. Without the mundane, there can be no one special. If Riddle succeeds, the wizard race will die off. If you are sick, you can not stop him."

"I'm not sick," Lily argued.

The snake gave a raspy laugh. "Well, I am here to take the curse away anyways," it replied.

Lily shrugged. "Go ahead." Suddenly its eyes were all she could see, silver and green.

There was a sharp pain on her arm and she was screaming.

[illegible]

"Come quick!" Not bothering to ask why, Edgar stepped into the fireplace, following Madame Pomfrey's retreating head.

A piercing scream made Edgar frown worriedly as he stepped out of the hearth, brushing ash from his robes. "I don't know what to do!" exclaimed Madame Pomfrey, looking through the potion supply cabinet.

Edgar raced into the white interior of the Hospital Wing and went to Lily's bedside. The girl was thrashing around in her sheets, eyes tightly closed. Her entire left arm was covered in a thick black haze that emitted a heat so strong that Edgar flinched backwards.

It was beyond anything he had seen before. He covered his ears against the banshee-like shrieks, leaned forward and tried to peer through the smoke.

Suddenly it was gone, vacuumed into her arm. Lily opened her shockingly green eyes and said hoarsely, "Bones?"

[illegible]

Lily looked around the white room in confusion. "What am I... Where am I?" she asked. Her voice was raspy and her arm felt like it had been branded all over.

"Hospital Wing," he replied, hazel eyes wide. "What happened to you?"

Lily looked down at her arm. The tattoo was there, lurking on her wrist. She brought it up to her face, inspecting it. The Mark's silver and green diamond pattern was now interlaced with black and red swirls.

"Hello?" she said, inspecting it.

"She's still hallucinating," Bones sighed to Madame Pomfrey as she walked into the curtained area.

Lily ignored him. "Can you talk?" she asked it.

There was a stifled gasp from the nurse. "Did you know that she could-"

"Hush," Bones said and walked up to Lily. He put a warm hand to her forehead. "Fever's gone," he declared.

"What happened?" Lily asked the Mark.

There was a faint hiss and a small voice told Lily, "I took away the curses."

"Did that thing just-"

"Poppy, would you please just leave for a minute?" Bones said sharply, turning from Lily. The nurse sniffed and left, jerking the curtains closed behind her. "Now," Bones said, turning to Lily. "Did that thing just hiss?"

Lily narrowed her eyes at him. "Does it matter?" she snapped.

Bones' jaw dropped. "Your voice..."

Lily's hand jumped to her throat. "What?" she said faintly.

"Say, er, 'vile vampires vant to suck blood,'" Bones instructed.

"Vile vampires vant to suck blood," Lily repeated. Her voice was strange to her own ears. She looked back at the tattoo. "What did you do?"

"I took away all the harmful spells on you," it replied. "You are safe now. At least from your own body." It curled into a pinball sized circle on her thumb.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Sleeping," it hissed, opening one eye to glare up at her.

She looked back up to find Bones staring at her, mouth open and wide-eyed. "You're a Parselmouth?" he asked incredulously.

[illegible]

(1)- IN HORROR

[illegible]

Yeah, so this is the first half. The other half is already up, but if you will review both chapters, the next chapter will probably be even longer!

"Ennerverate," Lily intoned, waving her wand over Bellatrix's motionless body.

Black lashes fluttered open to reveal her eyes, which were the blue color of a half-frozen river. She blinked and sat up, glaring up at Lily. "What did you do?"

"What I'm good at," she whispered, allowing her voice to stay at her normal level so as not to raise any suspicions.

Bellatrix scanned the empty Hospital Wing. "Where's Pomfrey?"

"I waited until she went to dinner and snuck up here to undo it," Lily replied. "She couldn't see me or she's know that I'm the Stunner."

"How are you feeling?" Bellatrix asked quickly, rising from the bed to tower over Lily. "Well, I trust."

"Perfect."

Bellatrix narrowed her eyes. "I hit you..." she muttered, peering into Lily's face.

"With what?" Lily asked innocently, raising an eyebrow.

"Nothing." Bellatrix gathered herself and gave Lily a bitter smile. "I would never curse our precious Velisna."

Lily drew her wand and pressed it to Bellatrix's throat. "Speak my true name again and I will kill you."

Fear flared in Bellatrix's cold eyes. "Fine," she spat, taking a step backwards.

"Stay here," Lily ordered. Bellatrix froze. "Get back in bed and tell Madame Pomfrey that you just woke up."

Bellatrix, glowering, moved back to the bed. She barely avoided shouldering Lily as she walked past her, but settled for muttering curses under her breath.

"Let's make a snowman," Tonks offered.

Lily kept her eyes closed. "Then I'd have to get up," she reasoned. Suddenly in an outburst of paranoia, she looked around for signs of anyone else. If He learned that she was playing with a half-blood...

"What's wrong?" Tonks asked Lily, looking pale.

"Nothing," she lied casually. "Listen, I probably need to get in," she said, getting to her feet and dusting off the lingering snow.

Tonks' face fell. "Now?"

"We can talk in the Common Room later," Lily assured her.

She started up to the castle, renewing the heat charm on her robes. Something cold smacked the back of her head with a small 'poof.'

Lily turned slowly and saw Potter standing beside Tonks, another snowball in his left hand. "Leaving so soon?"

"The birthday party's today, remember?" Lily drawled.

Potter flushed. "That's not fair."

"Lily!" Tonks shrieked.

Another snowball hit her head. She turned to see Black grinning behind her. "Bring it on, Evans," he challenged lazily.

Casting one last anxious look to the castle windows, Lily bent down and pulled up a handful of snow, patting it down. Splat! Another one hit her ear. She turned and saw Remus with an uncharacteristically mischievous grin on his face. She was caught in a classic four-pronged attack, she discerned when Pettigrew got her on the neck.

Heading towards who she assumed weakest, Lily ran, not slowing as she neared Pettigrew. He looked around nervously, then dove out of

the way as she bolted past him. She turned and Tonks joined her. "What now, general?" she asked.

Lily whispered, "You take Remus and Pettigrew." Tonks nodded. "Five, four-"

A snowball hit Tonks in the stomach and she tore after Remus, aiming her small snowball carefully. Pettigrew dove after, laughing loudly.

"So, it's two on one," remarked James as he and Sirius closed in on Lily. "Unfair, don't you think?"

Lily raised an eyebrow. "Would you like to wait for your backup?" she taunted.

[illegible]

James couldn't believe she was actually playing along. He gestured to Sirius. "That's all the backup I'll ever need," he said.

Sirius grinned and threw a snowball at Lily. She dove away, somersaulting once to left and springing to her feet, both hands full of snow.

Both snowballs hit their marks. James wiped snow from his eyes and bent down to get another snowball. Before he could throw, though, another snowball hit his back. "Traitor!" he called to Sirius, who was bent double laughing.

"What can I say, mate? That chick has skills. If you can't beat her, join her." Sirius finished by pelting James with another snowball.

[illegible]

It was dusk when they decided to retire. Lily was more flushed than she'd been in years and her heart was racing pleasantly.

Potter was reenacting their fight as they all walked to the welcoming castle. "Then, you were like whoosh and I was whoa! and Sirius was like insanely fast!"

Black snorted. "Whoosh," he repeated. "Nice."

Potter laughed, tripped over a hidden root in the snow and fell down. Lily offered her hand and pulled him easily to his feet.

"Thanks," he said.

'You're rather graceful,' she observed.

He laughed again and held open the front doors for her. Tonks fell into step beside her as they walked in. "I'm soaked," she declared. Lily waved her wand and dried Tonks' clothes. "Thanks."

Lily muttered, "Sure.' They started to walk to the Great Hall, but Lily objected, "I'm not hungry." If Bellatrix saw her with the Marauders when she was already so mad the Dark Lord would know by midnight.

Potter shrugged. "Want to come to the kitchens instead?"

Lily paused for a moment. Then her aching stomach made up her mind. "All right," she conceded. "Lead on."

[illegible]

"Isabellita, mia darling!" Black cried as he entered, swooping down to engulf a house-elf in a hug. "You're my besta frienda!" he said, false Italian accent clasing in Lily's ears.

"It'sa Sirius!" said the house-elf, blushing at the affection. "Anda my other Marauders!"

"Can Ia have soma spaghetti?" asked Black, straightening to tower over the horde of house-elves.

"Ah, Sirius, you'rea messing with me," said the house-elf. Lily looked around at the scurrying creatures curiously. "What can I get the rest of youa?"

"I'd like spaghetti too," Lily said. Isabellita grinned, showing carefully cleaned teeth.

"I'd be glad to helpa you," said the house-elf. "Come ona guysa!" she called to the other chefs. "Zese peoples are wanting some spaghetti!"

"May I have some brownies?" asked Tonks politely. A plate of fudge and blonde brownies were shoved into her hands immediately and they were all ushered to a small table in the corner.

"We should do this every night," James shrugged.

Lily sighed. "Maybe..." she said.

"Eat some of the chocolate desserts," hissed the Mark softly.

Lily brought her arm up to her mouth, masking her speech by wiping her hand on her sleeve. "Would you even be able to taste it?" Lily asked.

"We are connected," the Mark answered.

Lily washed her palette with a sip of water and bit into the nearest brownie. The rich warm flavor hit her tongue like a taste of ambrosia.

"Mmmm..." hissed the Mark. "How do you like it?"

"Delicious," she announced the room to cover for answering her tattoo.

Her companions greeted her statement with odd looks (2). "Eh?" Remus asked.

"Never mind," she told them.

"Okay," Black began, "a hag and a werewolf walk into a bar, right? Then the hag says..." he trailed off.

"Forget the punch line again, Padfoot?" Remus asked.

"Ooklay at the oorday," he muttered. "We're not supposed to be in here."

McGonagall spotted them immediately. However, it was not anger on her face, but relief.

"Students are to report to their Common Rooms immediately," McGonagall said hurriedly. "We need a head count."

"Why?" asked Potter, rising from his seat.

Lily rose slower. She had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach.

McGonagall shook her head and ushered them out of the door. "Go directly to the Tower." As Lily passed, the professor touched her arm. "If you will come with me?"

Lily nodded carefully and gestured for Tonks to go on without her.

McGonagall led Lily along silently, both pairs of heels clicking loudly in the empty hallways.

"Professors Bones and Dumbledore wish to speak to you," McGonagall said as they reached Dumbledore's office. She knocked on the door once with the griffin knocker and called, "I've found her," and entered.

Lily trailed behind her, closing the door slowly. What had she done this time? Had they changed their minds? Was she going to Azkaban?

"I'm sorry," Bones was saying to Dumbledore. "We should this from the start."

"It's quite all right," Dumbledore replied. "I was planning on doing it tonight anyways. Miss Evans," he said, addressing Lily, "please, sit down. Minerva, thank you for escorting her here. Please attend to the rest of your House now."

McGonagall nodded sharply and left. Bones and Dumbledore were the only other occupants of the room, other than the brilliant phoenix in the corner.

"Mars bar?" asked Dumbledore.

Lily shook her head.

"Lily," Bones said, standing beside Dumbledore's imposing desk. "We need to know what happened when you met with Voldemort."

"He believed me," Lily said shortly, looking at a small silver figurine on a nearby table.

"He just believed you?" Bones asked. "Did you change any of our excuses?"

"I left out the injuries due to rabid Manicore attack and said that I was just tired," Lily offered.

Bones snorted. "The Manticore was Douglas' idea. Well, anything else?"

"Nothing important," Lily said softly.

"He didn't mention any plans to you, did he? No attacks?"

Oxygen was becoming harder and harder for Lily to grasp. "What happened?" Lily tried to keep her voice calm.

Bones looked away. Dumbledore sighed and met Lily's searching eyes. "There was an attack on Hogsmeade today." He took a deep breath. "A student was killed."

"Four Death Eaters entered Hogsmeade. Three students were wounded and one was killed," she said softly.

"Who?" The question spread across the room like a quiet wildfire.

[illegible]

The self-proclaimed Dark Lord sat carefully in his hard throne, surveying the quartet of followers that knelt before him in the cold stone room.

"You may rise," he granted.

Immediately, the tallest, rose, tore off his white mask and glared at him. "We did it. Will you let Laura go now?"

Voldemort raised his wand and murmured, "Crucio."

Once the man was through screaming, Voldemort said calmly, "How many did you get?"

"I killed someone," panted a woman, giving a breathy giggle. She was pale under her dark hood and her gray-hazel eyes were feverish as she laughed again.

"One?" Voldemort asked slowly.

The shortest, Felix Kuck, gave a humble bow. "We hurt some others. Two students and a teacher," he said, eyes downcast humbly.

"How badly," Voldemort asked.

"I killed someone," repeated the pale woman.

"One student broke his leg. The other got hit with Nott's Coughing Hex. The teacher got the Random Sleep spell," the shortest reported.

"What made you choose that particular spell?" Voldemort asked calmly, despite being infuriated.

"My lord," said Kuck, "if he is ever in another dangerous situation, he will die."

"I suppose," Voldemort said. "So," he said, addressing the tallest, "everyone contributed, correct?"

The man paled, eyes wide. "Yes," he lied softly.

Voldemort raised a dark eyebrow. "What exactly did she do?" he asked, gesturing to the woman.

"She killed someone," the tall man replied awkwardly.

"Anything else?"

The man did not reply, staring stoically over Voldemort's shoulder.

"She made that building fall, remember Gaven?" answered Kuck. "Made that kid's leg break, remember?"

"Oh," said the tall man.

"Oh indeed," the Dark Lord said, smiling thinly. "So she got two, Nott got one and Kuck got one. What leaves how many for you?" The man was silent. "Aren't you going to answer?"

"None," said the man through clenched teeth.

"Ah," said the Dark Lord. "And why is that?"

"I don't know," he spat.

"My lord, Gaven was watching our backs," said the shortest.

"I don't like liars," Voldemort hissed. "Crucio!" Kuck fell, screaming. The tallest stood straight, guilt playing in his eyes.

"Now you will die," Voldemort told him. His jaw clenched, but he did not try to run. "You should know, though," Voldemort continued, "Laura's already dead."

That brought him to life. "You sick-"

"Avada Kendavra," Voldemort said over him. A flash of green light illuminated the small room and the annoying man was dead.

[illegible]

Severus emerged from his room after studying to find all the Slytherins crowded downstairs. he went immediately to the couch where his allies sat.

"Oh, hello, Snape," said Bellatrix calmly.

"What's going on?" he asked sharply.

Narcissa shrugged her thin shoulders. "Hogsmeade attack. Some Gryff died."

"Who?" Severus asked.

"Someone Fairfield or other," the blonde said with a dismissive gesture.

Severus nodded, careful to seem as uncaring as she was.

Slughorn raced into the room. "Head count!" he shouted as soon as he got enough breath. "First years line up here!"

A group of small students moved to the front of the Common Room.

Bellatrix scoffed to the Slytherins around her. "All of us will be here," she drawled. "We're the purest House."

"Second years," Slughorn called.

"Our Lord wouldn't order an attack on one of us," Bellatrix finished triumphantly.

"Joshua Smithson?" called Slughorn. "Has anyone seen Mister Smithson?"

"A building fell on him," said a fifth year, leaning casually against the stone wall.

"Where is he now?" asked Slughorn, paling.

The fifth year shrugged, "The Wing, probably."

Slughorn moved the fireplace and threw in a pinch of glistening powder. "Yes?" asked Madame Pomfrey.

"Do you have one Joshua Smithson with you?" he asked.

"Yes, he's almost healed."

"Thank you," Slughorn said, withdrawing from the emerald flames. "Fifth years," he continued.

Severus looked at Bellatrix with a raised eyebrow. She sniffed. "We all know that Smithsons are interbred," she drawled, rather hypocritically, Severus thought. "Besides, I heard that his great-grandfather was a werewolf."

Narcissa looked horrified. "A werewolf? How'd he get into Slytherin?"

"The Hat had a lapse of judgment," Bellatrix assured them.

"What if it was an accident? The building, I mean," Narcissa said. Her silvery blonde braid flashed as she moved her head to look at all of the surrounding Slytherins.

Bellatrix rolled her eyes. "Cissy, Cissy, Cissy," she purred, "The Dark Lord does nothing by accident."

"Hey," he replied huskily.

She flushed and hurried away.

Finally Jennifer and Jillian emerged from the dormitories. They had been talking quietly when they saw Sirius. "Oh," said Jennifer, stopping.

Sirius pushed himself off the wall and approached them. Jilliane crossed her arms and scowled at him. "What do you want?"

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "About Jessica."

Jennifer was biting her lip, looking away. Jillian glared up at him, blonde hair in a messy ponytail. "Don't talk to us. You broke Jessica's heart. Why should we talk to you? We were in Hogsmeade trying to make her happy. She was so sad. And then..." She broke off, losing her steam.

"Let's just go," whispered Jennifer, grabbing her arm and pulling her away.

Sirius closed his eyes and swallowed difficultly. Was it really his fault?

[illegible]

Dumbledore stood up, china blue eyes solemn. The already hushed hall grew silent but for a few sniffs. "A great tragedy, as you all know, has occurred. Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield wanted you to know that the funeral will be this Thursday. All those who wish to go should sign up on the sheet posted in each Common Room. Class on Monday is cancelled. Let us please have a moment of quiet reflection."

Lily bowed her head along with the rest of her table. She stared unseeingly at her gold plate, listening to the muffled sobs around her.

"Thank you," Dumbledore said gently.

There was a rustle as everyone sat up straight. Lily glanced over at the Slytherin table. Bellatrix was in the same position, leaning against her chair, as she'd been before. There were obviously some people who didn't respect the dead.

Food appeared along the tables, steaming and delectable. Lily looked down at the bowl of scrambled eggs in front of her and found her appetite gone.

She waited until the noise in the hall had reached normal level, then rose and walked to where Sirius was sitting. He and Potter were sitting alone, with no sign of Remus or Pettigrew.

"Hello Lily," Potter greeted.

"Hey," Sirius said in an attempt at a cheerful voice.

Lily met his eyes. "I know you liked Fairfield, so I wanted to offer my condolences," she said softly.

"Thanks," Sirius replied.

"Oh, and Sirius." He looked back up in surprise at her use of his first name. Lily paused and handed him a slip of parchment. "You're welcome."

[illegible]

James sat on the edge of his plush bed, staring at the wall. He let go of the golden ball in his hand, watched it fly a few feet away and caught it. Release. Catch. Release. Catch.

Remus was buried in a thick novel, breathing deeply as he'd been since he woke up. Peter was lying on the floor, staring at the ceiling. He had skipped breakfast to go to the library that morning. That had surprised James, but he remembered that Peter was having trouble in Charms. He must have been studying.

Sirius entered, dragging his feet. "Hullo," he greeted heavily.

"Lo," Peter replied. James and Remus didn't speak.

Sirius stood next to the mirror, staring at his own reflection.

James pocketed the Snitch and stood. "What's up, Padfoot?"

Sirius showed him the slip of parchment that Evans had given him. Sharp slanted handwriting read 'Swish and jab. Oscurelo.'

"What's it do?"

"Don't know 'til I try, right?" Sirius pulled out his wand and pointed at the wall, speaking the spell.

"Nothing happened," James noted.

"No," Sirius replied sarcastically.

"What's it for?" Remus asked, putting down his book.

"Dunno. Evans gave it to me," Sirius said.

Remus took the paper from James and looked over it for a second. He gave a small smile and said, "Try this. Oscurelo." He jabbed his wand at Sirius' head.

Black hair overtook Sirius' blonde, spreading like dusk. "What?" Sirius asked.

James gestured to the mirror. Sirius looked into it and jumped. "Yes!" he exclaimed.

James laughed at his stunned expression. "Looking good. Black is black again."

Sirius grinned widely. "Lily Evans is my hero," he breathed.

Remus rolled his eyes and moved back to his bed. James ruffled Sirius' black hair with a smile. Then, his face fell. "Are you going? To the funeral, I mean," James asked awkwardly.

Sirius cleared his throat. "Yeah," he grunted.

James nodded. "Me too." He turned to Peter and Remus. "You?"

They both nodded. "Of course," Remus said quietly. "Did they ever, er, catch them?" he asked.

Sirius scowled. "We don't even know who they were, other than they were Death Eaters." He turned suddenly to James. "You don't think Evans... I mean, they didn't like each other."

"She was with us," James said defensively. "She can't have had anything to do with it, right?"

[illegible]

The hallways were silent despite it being noon on a Monday. Lily meandered through, absorbed in guilty thoughts, each new one tearing through her like a bullet.

Why hadn't she asked Voldemort his plans? Had they been after her? To take her away? Or to kill her?

Lily's feet led her to the castle's front doors. She paused, but then pulled her cloak hood over her head and walked outside.

The clean white snow but Lily's face as it came down as though punishing her. Was all this sorrow her fault? she asked herself again.

Lily was buffeted by the wind as she walked to the lake. The late January chill seeped through her thick black cloak and down to her bones.

"Lily?" he asked in confusion. "Why aren't you at the funeral?"

She stepped forward, unconsciously slamming the door behind her. Lily stood in front of his desk, hands clenched into fists at her side. "What would He say?" she spat.

Edgar cocked his head slightly to one side. "What's going on?"

Lily looked uncertain for a moment, but then she met his eyes. "I'm His Secret Keeper."

[illegible]

(1)- Just so you all know, almost the whole conversation on both sides was a lie.

(2)- She answered in Parseltongue, in case you didn't catch it.

[illegible]

I left you with a cliffie so you might want to review a little more.

I NEED A VOTE! Now, do you all want these super long chapter that take a long time to post, or would you rather not have chapter length by review and have updates a little more often? I need some input from you. Thanks for reading.

“Eh?” Edgar choked out.

“Nightshade Mansion, Death Eater Headquarters. His house. I’m the Secret Keeper,” she said quickly, clenching her fists tighter.

“Well, that’s,” Edgar struggled for a word, “good. Brilliant. Amazing!” he said as all the implications dawned on him. After all these years, they could really catch Voldemort. They had a Death Eater eager to sing. “Er, sit down.”

Lily blinked. “Oh yeah,” she said slowly, unclenching her fists and perching on the edge of the maroon chair.

“I would offer you tea, but I’m afraid Professor Williams’ store... expired,” Edgar said. He was unsure how to continue; what do you say to a confessing person? He tried to remember some of his Auror classes. “Er, go on.”

Lily tensely released a breath. “Do you have a map by any chance? Of southern England?”

Edgar nodded and rose to look through a cabinet against the wall. Now was it under ‘E’ for England, ‘S’ for south or ‘M’ for maps? Rolling his eyes, he pulled out his wand and muttered, “Accio south England map.”

The bottom drawer flew open and a roll of parchment shot out at him. He caught it smoothly and laid it out before Lily on the desk.

“Nightshade Manor is... here,” Lily said, pointing a short nail at a point on the map. The map grew before his eyes to accommodate a previously hidden area. Edgar used a quill to outline the area before he forgot the location.

Once done, Edgar sat back down across from Lily, tapping his dried quill against the desk. “You’d say I know you pretty well, right?” he asked suddenly.

The defiant look she had first bore had been slowly fading in the past minutes and now she was wary, watching him as fearfully she had done when they first met. She nodded once.

Edgar brought the quill up to his mouth and chewed pensively on the eagle feather. "So I know you, but I don't know about this. Why? If I may ask, obviously," he added.

Lily met his eyes, determination slowly rising back. “I realized this had gone on too long,” she muttered. “My keeping back information like this is letting people die.”

Edgar nodded and tapped the quill against his lip. "We should let Dumbledore know," he mentioned, appraising her reaction thoughtfully.

She averted her eyes. "Then I should probably be going," she offered.

“Listen,” Edgar said, leaning forward, “I know what you’re thinking, but you’re on your side now whether you meant to or not. Neutrality is not an option.” By her silence, he guessed it was the latter.

“Either way, you’ll have to trust me, and the Headmaster. Besides,” he added logically, “you’re the only one who can tell him anyways. Secret Keeper and all that.”

[illegible]

James closed his eyes and bowed his head with the rest of the congregation.

People stood and spoke about Jessica: how good she was, how nice she was, how wonderful she was. Thinking back, James could think of many times when none of those statements were true, but he kept quiet in respect for the dead.

Then Sirius stood up beside James. All eyes of the congregation turned to him. Sirius cleared his throat, silver eyes brimming with unshed tears. “As most of you kn- know, I was Jess’s boyfriend. I... I

loved her.” Burning tears traced their way down Sirius’s face. “I- I- I can’t- I can’t express how so- sorry I am that she’s g-gone. I love you Jess.” Short speech done, Sirius collapsed back into his chair.

James put a hand on Sirius's shoulder. He looked sideways at James, tears streaming down his face and gave a watery smile. "Good job, mate," James encouraged.

[illegible]

Lily shakily brushed a lock of long red hair from her eyes and gripped the porcelain edge of the sink, staring at her reflection. She was pale and her eyes were overly bright.

"I'm going to die," she whispered. "He'll know it was me, He'll know..."

How could she have been so rash? Caught up in the moment? Only one person could betray Him, and it was her. She'd known all along that any betrayal was death.

There was a rustle as two Js entered the dormitories. Lily took a deep breath and exited the bathroom.

Both girls were in black dress robes and had red puffy eyes. For once they were silent, both more solemn than ever.

Lily met their eyes for the briefest of moments, then turned and left the room.

She walked in a daze, so unlike she had been those hours before on her way to her death.

Snow was driving down harshly to the ground, tearing at the trees in the Frobidden Forest, leaves exposing their fragile pale undersides.

Lily bent and checked to assure that her shoelaces were tightly tied, then began to run.

Magical strength flowed through her, rushing, pulsing through her body. Her black sneakers sunk into the snow piles, but soon she was moving so fast that her feet barely brushed the white surface.

Her Rosake Drought-infused blood roared in her ears, blocking out all thought. There was only her body and the snow.

She slowed as she reached the strong iron gates at the Hogwarts' entrance which were left open for the returning students. Wide open. Snow billowed around her heels as Lily skidded to a halt. She could see lights in the distance from Hogsmeade, faint behind the snow. Beyond that was nothing but freedom.

She had another chance. She had done her part. Petunia was safe and the Death Eater headquarters exposed. Earlier that day she had realized that she owed Voldemort nothing—now she realized she had no obligations to the Order either.

Also, and almost more pressingly, Dumbledore would have surely gotten Moody to deactivate her detection bracelet in the assumption that she would go to the funeral. She hoped.

For once there was absolutely nothing and no one to stop her. If the Order succeeded in raiding the headquarters, she wouldn't be hunted. If not, she would be in hiding, no matter who she was with. She would rather hide on her own terms than on Dumbledore's.

If she didn't hurt anyone, surely the Order would leave her alone. Why should she stay?

[illegible]

A bored Sirius looked over the top of his Charms book at Remus, who was studiously flipping through his own book. Sirius began humming quietly, testing his reaction.

Remus kept his face stoically in his book, amber eyes skimming the lines rapidly. Sirius increased his humming volume.

Still met with no response, Sirius began singing softly. “Magic, peace and love, whether hippogriff or a dove.”

Remus sighed and turned the page. Sirius, frustrated, sang louder, voice ringing through the library. “Don’t be snooty, just shake that booty! Keep it groovy, babe, just keep it-”

Remus casually dog-eared his page and scowled up at Sirius, who trailed off, "...Groovy?" Sirius grinned sheepishly. "Sorry, Remus old pal!" Sirius exclaimed. "I sometimes have to sing to read."

"It might also help if you turn your book rightside up," Remus muttered, running a hand through his short hair.

Sirius quickly flipped the text over. “Ah. I see. Well, now that neither of us is reading, we should go to Hogsmeade. Peter’s off doing something, and so is Prongs, so we have the afternoon off.”

Remus rolled his eyes and picked up his book again, flipping to the dog-eared page. "I'm studying for the quiz on Thursday. You can go to Hogsmeade."

“Not alone,” whined Sirius.

“Not with me.”

[illegible]

"I can't believe I agreed to come with you," Remus complained, ducking under the tunnel's low ceiling.

Sirius looked back at him and smirked. “You need to put down the books every once in a while.”

“You need to pass Charms. Aurors require an E on the Charms NEWT,” Remus reminded him.

Sirius shrugged. "I'll cram before class." He almost slid on a patch of loose pebbles, but balanced himself.

Remus growled under his breath. "How do you do that?"

"I'm just amazing," Sirius said, continuing onwards. "Dog reflexes."

"I meant cramming," Remus clarified, shuffling his feet along the tunnel.

"Same reason. Y'know how dogs can learn new tricks and stuff? Yeah, that's me."

Remus laughed. "Sit. Stay. Stay! Bad dog, Snuffles, bad dog."

Before Remus could register what was happening, Sirius had morphed and tackled Remus to the ground. Remus's amber eyes widened as he fell. "Sirius!" he exclaimed.

Sirius turned and trotted up the tunnel, tail raised high in triumph.

Remus chuckled softly as he got up. "Stupid mutt," he muttered.

Sirius turned and gave him a haughty glare before morphing back into a human. "I'm a pureblood. Pedigreed and stuff."

Remus shook his head, laughing. "Most humans don't brag about having a pedigree."

"You've never talked to my family," Sirius called over his shoulder as he reached the end of the tunnel. He pushed up on the trapdoor slab. "Help me with this."

Remus walked over and obediently pushed on the other end of the slab. When it didn't budge, he said, "There must be something on top."

Sirius just pushed harder, face reddening.

"Sirius, back up."

"No," Sirius growled.

Remus rolled his eyes and pulled out his wand. "Wingardium leviosa," he intoned, swishing his wand. There was a loud clunk as something rolled off the wobbling trapdoor as it rose in the air.

That something kept rolling on out of the opening and straight onto Sirius's head. Sirius yelped and clutched his head.

"I told you to back up," Remus said. "Just be glad it didn't shatter. You'd have glass and Fizzing Whizbees in your skull. Then again," Remus continued thoughtfully as he jumped through the hole. "I think you already do."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Sirius growled. "If you're done gloating...?" He held up his hand.

Remus reached down his hand to pull Sirius up. Sirius grabbed the proffered appendage and jerked Remus back into the hole.

As Remus hit the muddy ground, Sirius morphed into a dog and leapt into the cellar. Remus pulled himself up and moved the slab back into place. "Thank you Sirius," he said sarcastically.

"Welcome," Sirius said airily, looking at a shelf. "Let's go up top," he suggested.

Remus followed him up to the store. "Hello?" he asked.

The candles had all been blown out, the candy was stored in shrunken boxes and the counter had been cleared.

"What's going on?" Remus asked, looking around the shop for any type of clue. He approached the boarded windows and peered through the crack in the wood. "I guess I know why now," Remus muttered.

Sirius came up behind him and looked through a different hole. "Why didn't they clean it up yet?" he asked gruffly.

The streets were in shambles. Bricks from the building across the street was strewn across the cobblestones.

Remus shrugged, looking over the Death Eaters' devastation of the town. "We should leave," Remus mumbled.

"No," Sirius said, moving towards the door. "I want to see."

"See what? Everything's gone."

Sirius froze. "Fine," he muttered, turning away. "Let's just go."

The journey back to the school remained silent until they neared the statue. Courage plucked up, Remus suddenly said, "It's not your fault, you know."

Sirius whirled on him. "What?" he demanded.

"All this," Remus said, gesturing vaguely around, "isn't your fault."

Sirius narrowed his eyes and growled, "How would you know? You think you're so smart."

Remus met Sirius's eyes. "There is no way this is your fault. So don't go feeling guilty."

Sirius exploded. "You have no clue what you're talking about!" he shouted, "Jess was in Hogsmeade because of me! She died because of me!"

"You didn't kill her," Remus reasoned, fighting to keep his voice calm. "She probably would have been there anyways."

"It would have been different! If I hadn't broken up with her, we'd've been there together! I could have protected her! How can you stand there and say it's not my fault?"

"Who's more to blame?" Remus challenged. "You? Or Voldemort?"

"That's completely beside the point. If—"

“If Voldemort wasn’t an evil git, none of this would have happened,” Remus continued.

"I'll kill him," Sirius growled. "Whoever did this, I'll kill him." Sirius continued forward, muttered death threats.

Satisfied by taking Sirius's mind off his guilt, Remus followed him the rest of the way up the tunnel.

[illegible]

“We need to take immediate action,” Edgar proclaimed.

Moody nodded sharply. "We need a plan of action. Why isn't Evans here? We need blueprints, the defense spells, everything."

“Professor Dumbledore thought it was best she stayed at school,” Edgar explained.

“This is a bit more important than education!” bellowed Moody.

“There is nothing more important than education,” Dumbledore said solemnly as he entered. “It is the building block for life.”

Moody grumbled under his breath, but did not openly protest.

“Miss Evans will be joining us after her classes on Friday,” Dumbledore continued.

“How can we trust her?” asked Diggle abruptly. “She was a prisoner here only weeks ago. She must be after our blood.”

"I agree," said Sara. "This is ridiculous to trust the Stunner."

Edgar put his hand over hers and smiled. "Trust me. This is the best lead we've had yet."

“We’re not about to have a vote!” exclaimed Moody, standing. “I’m telling you as Tactics Leader that we’re on Sunday!” He raised his voice, “and if any of you lilylivers want to back out, you can submit to our mind-wipe and be on your way.”

"So much for democracy," muttered Diggle huffily.

Moody snapped his quill and threw it at Diggle. “We’re not in a democracy! We’re in a war!”

Diggle ducked the first half of the quill but the feathered end hit his face. "What was uncalled for," he sniffed.

“I’ll show you what’s uncalled for,” Moody shouted, taking a step towards the other man.

Dumbledore rose from his chair. “Alastor.” Moody sank down into his chair, muttering some more. “Now, if there is a problem with a plan, please let me know.” Diggle spluttered and sank into his chair. Edgar rolled his eyes at their immaturity. “Now,” Dumbledore said, “Emmeline, you are in charge of the stake-out team, so choose them carefully. We need to know how often and when Voldemort is in. We need to walk most of the way, for he will doubtless have strong anti-Apparation wards. If we take them down, Death Eaters will flood in before we get to the Dark Lord. Edgar, you’re in charge of talking to Miss Evans before Friday.”

Edgar nodded and took notes the rest of the meeting with an FYEO charm before leaving.

He'd let Lily have the night off, as it only hours after her confession.

[illegible]

“I hate her!” screeched Bellatrix. “The Dark Lord likes her best and she Stunned me!” She threw a lamp at the wall.

Severus casually stopped it from shattering with his wand. “Not so loudly,” he warned. “You’re not even supposed to be in here.”

“Actually, you can’t go to our dorm, not vice versa,” Narcissa said lightly, filing her nails on a top bunk.

“Besides,” Severus continued, “what if Slughorn heard you yelling that? We’d be dead.”

“I don’t care!” she shrieked, picking up a thick History of Magic book. “I hate her!”

“Calm down, darling,” Rudolphus soothed from his bed.

“Don’t tell me what to do!” Bellatrix threw the book at Rudolphus. It hit him soundly on the head, leaving a livid black bruise.

“And just think,” chortled Regulus to Rudolphus, “you only have to spend the rest of your life married to her.”

“Scat,” spat Bellatrix, pointing the the door, shaking with fury.

He ddi so quickly, dodging another book throuwn at him.

“I don’t see what the big deal is,” Rabastan muttered from the other top bunk. “So she Stunned you. You did try to curse her.”

“Nobody beats me!” Bellatrix shouted, eyes blazing. “We have to get rid of her.”

“The Lord will be furious if you hurt her,” Severus said.

“He’ll understand. I can be His new Stunner,” she declared.

“One problem, Severus pointed out silkily. “You’re not a Stunner.”

“Stupefy!” she shouted, drawing her wand and pointing it at Severus.

He blocked it readily with his wand and then casually resheathed it. Bellatrix turned on Rabastan on the other bed and repeated the bed.

He fell off the edge, where he had been perched. “Now, you wake him up,” she said, pointing to Rudolphus.

He started and sat up. "Well, what's the spell?"

“Ennerverate,” Severus told him. “Just wave your wand.”

He stood up and looked down at younger brother. “Uh, ennerverate,” he grunted, waving his wand casually.

“Yes!” cried Bellatrix. “I am a Stunner!”

"It's Ennerverate. Not Ennerverate," Severus corrected quietly.

“Oh,” Rudolphus pulled his wand out again. “Ennerverate.”

Rabastan blinked awake and sat up, holding his head. "Ouch."

Bellatrix noticed his new consciousness and let out a shriek more frightening than any banshee.

Severus leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes. He felt vaguely sorry for her fiancé, but, peeking over at the black bruise on his forehead, Severus couldn't help a small smirk.

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Just to give you all a heads-up, I'm going to write a one-fic of choice for my 1000th reviewer. Just so you might give me the needed 200 so reviews. Also, did any of you notice the lack of Lily in the last half? Which did she do? Stay? Or leave?

The mask was easily transfigured from a discarded newspaper and no one around noticed the shadow slipping among the living.

Hood pulled tight against the simulated wind and snow in the streets of underground London, the figure in black moved to the looming building ahead. The marble steps were barely grazed by feet moving too fast for mortal eyes to follow.

The eyes of a hunted fox flicked sideways behind a black mask, quickly finding an appealing door inside. It was simplicity itself to slip by the senile goblins and through the tunnel entrance.

The tunnel was unlit, but the darkness was penetrated by newly transformed wolf eyes. The black figure leapt off the nearly vertical drop-off fearlessly, black wind threatening to tear off the hood. There was a loud thud when the figure hit the ground, but it was already gone, rushing away in the black labyrinth, black sneakers pounding the graveled ground beside the worn cart tracks.

Gravel flew as the shoes dug into the ground, halting all movement. This was the last of the poorly guarded doors. It would be easy to break in here. The shadow turned away, already stepping forward. There was only one vault to be taken.

A wand swished and a blanket of violet light fell over the path ahead. The ground turned dark red starting only meters from the shadow's black shoes.

There was a slight pause before the figure jumped onto the track waving the wand again. Black sneakers morphed into a set of wheels and the shadow began rolling down the pathway, knees bent slightly to maintain balance.

Down, down, down went the figure, troubling thoughts left far, far, far behind. The figure blinked as light hit behind the mask, blinding. Arms flailed as the shadow rocked, disoriented, on the wheels. Another flash of light, fuchsia this time, halted the figure. It skated forward towards gargantuan double doors.

Slumbering peacefully beside the open entrance was a sapphire dragon, smoke billowing from its nostrils with every exhale.

How to sneak past? Persian Sharpsnouts had an exceedingly keen sense of smell. The moment the figure was downwind, the dragon would wake.

With little time to waste, the figure drew its wand silently and cast a sky blue mist over the sleeping creature. As it inhaled, the mist vanished, vacuumed into the nose.

Slowly, the figure skated past, one emerald eye on the guardian. It grunted and the solid shadow froze, caught in the firelight.

Carefully the figure inched forward, through the gate and onwards. Now away from the creature, the figure exhaled, breath crystallizing in the frigid tunnel air.

After rolling forwards for another eternity, it reached its destination. 1373. The wheels became shoes again as the figure left the track.

There was no movement for a moment, then the figure drew its wand once again.

[illegible]

“What in the bloody hell do you mean she’s gone?” exclaimed Moody.

Edgar sighed through the Floo connection. “She wasn’t at breakfast, so I asked her dorm mates to check her bed. Nothing.”

“Did she take everything with her?”

“No, that’s the strange part. Everything, as far as we know, is still there.”

“Well,” said Moody, “where would she go with no money or supplies? She must be somewhere in the school. Besides, the bracelet would have stopped her before she got very far.”

“Miss Evans?” asked McGonagall, looking up from her roll call.

“She’s not here,” Jillian said primly, snapping closed her make-up kit.

“Well, where is she?” McGonagall asked impatiently.

“I dunno,” Jillian replied, shrugging.

“Professor Bones couldn’t find her either,” Jennifer drawled. “Maybe she’s in the Hospital Wing or something.”

“So, no one can tell me where Miss Evans is?” the teacher snapped. “Did she vanish?”

“Again?” Bellatrix drawled from across the room. “Naught, naughty Evans.”

“Miss Black, I would appreciate it if you refrained from talking,” McGonagall said.

“Have you seen her?” Sirius asked James as McGonagall continued calling roll.

“No,” he replied thoughtfully, “Not since Sunday.”

Remus turned to join the conversation. “You don’t think Voldemort—” James shoved Remus’s shoulder roughly. “What?” he asked sharply.

McGonagall scowled down at him. “Here?” he said meekly.

Nodding, McGonagall moved on in the list.

“So, you don’t think...” he continued.

Sirius shook his head. “How would he get in here?”

“I—here!—guess,” James conceded.

“Shut up,” Remus hissed as McGonagall addressed the class as a whole to begin the lesson.

“Why?” asked Sirius, leaning back in his chair.

"I want to listen to the teacher," Remus muttered.

James and Sirius exchanged glances and burst into hysterical laughter.

[illegible]

With dozens of shrunken money sacks tucked in its pockets, the shadow moved steadily back up the tunnel, a small cloud of silver smoke pushing the skates.

The dark tunnel steadily grew lighter as the golden gate approached again. Just a little closer and the spell could be cast again...

Wand out and ready, the figure skated over the threshold and began to swish its wand when one golden eye flickered open.

There was a deafening roar as the brobdingnagian beast rose to its haunches, fully awake. The shadow ducked as a bout of flame roared past the top of the hood. “Adurper!”

A smoky gray cloud covered the dragon's sapphire face. It breathed in and all the pepper flew into its nose. Blinded, the creature thrashed around, roaring loudly. The figure swept down the passageway, away from the guard dragon.

There was suddenly a pale pink mist in the air, binding the wheels to the track. The shadow moved back and forth, trying to dislodge the wheels. A rattling noise came from ahead—goblins checking on the dragon.

Quickly, the shadow slipped out of the frozen shoes, bathed itself in a thick violet mist and jumped sideways, landing on the wall and sticking to it like a bug.

The goblins' cart passed over the left-over wheels with a small bump. Neither creature noticed the shadow scuttling along the tunnel ceiling.

[illegible]

“Mr. Moody, sir, you have a visitor,” said the cool voice of his secretary outside his office.

“Send ‘em in,” Alastor replied, stabbing his report through with his quill.

Emmeline walked in to stand across from his desk. As there only Daily Prophet insider, Vance was sent in when they needed information fast.

“Is the fountain running?” asked Emmeline, the Order code for ‘are we being listened to?’

"No," Moody replied. "Now, tell me you have good news."

Emmeline bit her lip. “Actually...”

“At least tell me you know where she is,” Alastor groaned.

“We know where she was two hours ago,” Emmeline said hurriedly. Alastor raised his eyebrows. “Gringotts,” Emmeline said with an uncomfortable shrug.

“Withdrawing?” asked Alastor eagerly. “From her account?”

“You could say that...”

“Spit it out,” Alastor growled.

“She withdrew from someone’s account,” she said with a significant raising of her eyebrows.

“Huh?”

The woman pursed her lips. “No need to get huffy,” the woman muttered. “Let me try dis,” she said, casting a non-verbal spell over the bracelet. It stung sharply and emitted bright yellow sparks. “No... What about this?” A dark light covered the bracelet, which sparked and burned Lily’s wrist.

“Are you an idiot?” Lily exclaimed. “That obviously’s not right!”

“Sorry,” the woman muttered. “Erm, could you direct me to the person who cast this? I’m sure I could get the spell from them if—”

Lily jerked her wrist away from the woman. “You’re hopeless! Point me to someone who can help then. And, yes, you can have a few Galleons.”

“You should be asking de Key Man,” she said, reaching her hand out for the gold.

“Take me to him,” Lily said, pulling the woman up and dragging her from her store by the shoulder. “Now.”

The hag scurried down the street towards an even darker area of Knockturn Alley. “Come dis way, miss.”

Lily followed, hand not on the hag’s arm grasping her wand tightly. “In dere,” she whispered, pointing to a dank corner store.

Lily threw her a Galleon and entered the store, pulling her black hood farther over her head. “May I help you?” drawled a man at the counter, setting down a small silver box.

“Get this off me,” Lily said, thrusting her wrist across the counter. She pulled the gold-filled bag out of her pocket and set it next to her hand.

The man looked surprised, but examined the bracelet with a well-manicured hand. “Well, madam, you seem to have gotten a Binding Bangle latched to your wrist. Deactivated at the moment, apparently. It will take me a few minutes to detach.”

“Just do it,” Lily snarled, worry overpowering all caution.

The man left the counter into a back room, emerging after a minute with a small jar and a rag. "Be still," he warned, dipping the rag into the violet salve.

She was motionless as he covered the bracelet in the purple goo along with her entire hand. He cleansed his hand with the back of the rag and pulled his wand from his pocket. "Don't move," he reminded her. She nodded tensely. "Llevar tanarasam," he murmured, swishing the wand around her wrist. "Tallinium deoisa."

The bracelet suddenly began to glow bright white and burned like the heart of a flame. The man growled under his breath. "It's been activated," he told her. "Stay still!"

She swallowed the pain and met his eyes. "Go ahead."

He spoke a spell quickly and made a complicated shape around her burning hand. “Llevant a pulseranata!” he intoned. “Ranan!” There was a flash of blue light, then the bracelet disintegrated from her wrist. “There,” he said, wiping sweat from his brow.

She nodded with a sigh and turned to leave the store. “Madam?” the man asked. Lily turned to see him holding up the remains of the bracelet. “Would you like these?”

Lily shook her head shortly and exited the shop, leaving the man to count out the couple hundred Galleons she had left for him.

[illegible]

In the next chapter, Lily goes out to spend all that hard-earned money. Any predictions on what it'll be on? You won't be able to guess. ;D

"I'd like a room," drawled Lily.

"Name?" asked the man behind the marble counter, brushing invisible lint from his suit.

"Smith. Levi Smith," she replied, pulling her hood father over her face.

"Would you like a suite or—"

"Your best suite would be fine."

"Of course sir," said the man, bowing slightly. "Will you be needing someone for your bags?" He looked over the counter, searching for evidence of luggage.

"My bags have not arrived yet," Lily drawled. "If another flight loses my luggage..."

"I understand completely, sir. Well, if you would allow us to provide a toothbrush, we'd be much obliged."

"Please," Lily said, subconsciously checking her hood.

The man held out a card. "Room 612. I'll send someone up with some toiletries immediately."

"Thank you," said Lily, accepting the room card.

"The elevators are back and to the right," the man relayed.

Lily left him then, slinking towards the elevators. A sign to her left indicated stairs, so she gratefully took them to the sixth floor. With her Rosake Drought-powered limbs, it took only seconds.

The room was large with a quilted king bed to the side, accompanied by a widescreen television and complimentary shampoo and coffee in the loo. Lily removed her cloak to reveal her school robes and threw herself on the bed, letting out a raspy laugh. She'd done it. Finally! No more. Never again.

“But we need more information,” objected Edgar. “Besides, she could have been kidnapped for all we know. We can’t just forget about her. She did give us His location.”

“She’s done her part,” Emmeline protested hotly. “We should leave her alone.”

Albus rose to his feet. “Listen,” he said gently. “We need everyone to execute this plan. We do not have many extras to expend as a search team. Now, Emmeline, what has your stake-out team learned?”

[illegible]

“Again?” spat Voldemort. He grasped his tattoo, searching for his daughter.

Something was blocking him. Different than last time. There was a great presense in his path, so great that he did not question it, simply removed his hand as though burned.

“Avery!” The young man ran into the room, bowing repeatedly. “You are going to gather a group- a large group- and you are going to scour the univers for my Stunner.”

Avery, frozen mid-bow, stuttered, "T-the universe, milord?"

Voldemort raised a dark eyebrow. "Are you questioning orders?"

"No, of course not," he simpered, his fear showing clearly on his face.

“Good. Leave.”

The man scampered out of the room. Then the question began to plague the Dark Lord's mind. Was her disappearance involuntary? Or not?

Bellatrix muttered a curse (and not of the spell variety either) and said, “Does He know yet?”

Severus narrowed his eyes. “You didn’t do anything?”

“Of course not, you bloody idiot!” Bellatrix shouted.

The majority of the Common Room jumped in surprise at the shriek then looked away when she gave them a glare, shaking with fury.

Suddenly, a ball of furious feathers collided with Bellatrix's black hair. As Bellatrix detached the bird, Severus removed the parchment from its leg.

"As for whether He knows yet," Severus muttered as the Slytherins crowded to see the rouge owl. "I'm guessing He does." Severus shoved the old parchment into her hand and slinked away from the twittering Slytherins. (1)

[illegible]

“That brings your total to... 713, 000,001 euros.”

“Excellent,” Lily said, running a hand through her loose red hair. “Now, I’ll need that credit card with a third of that soon, one third into cash and the gold as is. Understand?”

“Yes ma’am. However, we as employees have to question—”

“You think I stole it?” Lily said, giving a light giggle. “Do I look like a thief?”

The man shook his head, but unconsciously fiddled with the walkie-talkie attached to his Armani suit.

“I found my bank in Sweden unreliable and heard that this was a superior bank. I assumed that wouldn’t be questioned like some commoner, but apparently—”

“No, no, ma’am. I, of course, thought as much, but you know, with the state of security, we have to at least inquire...”

“Very well,” Lily sniffed.

“So if you could just give us the name of your old bank, we could—”

“Obliviate,” she murmured.

“Pardon? What were we discussing?” asked the man with a dazed blink.

Lily smiled gently. “One third credit, one third cash and the rest as it is.”

“Of course, Miss,” he quietly checking the paper in front of him, “Robyn. It will take me a few hours to get your new credit card validated. All we need now is a code question to your vault. Just fill it out here and your answer here. Good.” The man gathered the sheets, rose, and bowed. “Come back here in an hour and we’ll have your card ready. Thank you.”

Lily sauntered down the street, peering casually from side to side. Where to go first... Well, she needed something to carry her new credit card in.

“Welcome to Prada, how may I help you today?” the sharply dressed attendant greeted, eyeing her solid black clothes in obvious distaste.

“Your best purse.”

The girl’s perfectly manicured eyebrows shot up. Containing her surprise with difficulty, she said, “It is very expensive...”

“I can handle it,” Lily cut it. “Show it to me.”

“What color?” the girl asked, gesturing for her to step forward.

Lily removed her hood and held up one of her red locks. "This color. Exactly. If not," she reached up and put a finger to her eyes. "This color."

“Would you come with me please?” Lily followed the woman to the store’s back realms. “Would you like a diamond lining?” inquired then attendant. She looked over some large handbags, glancing at Lily for color reference.

"If possible," Lily replied, casually inspecting her worn nails.

After a few more minutes of searching, the attendant drew out a huge red purse. "Is this what you had in mind?"

“Perfect,” Lily muttered, inspecting it closer. Finding no obvious flaws, she met the employee’s eyes. “I’ll take it. Oh, and throw in a matching suitcase while you’re at it.”

[illegible]

“A word, Snape,” Sirius growled, latching on to Snape’s arm.

James stepped to Snape's other side. "We have to talk." Snape replied with a small nod.

The three boys entered a nearby empty classroom, making sure not to draw too much attention to themselves. Snape quickly cast a spell over the room and turned to the two boys. “Any news?”

“We were just about to ask you the same question. I mean, after both Remus and Lily during that duel, we figured out our plan.” Sirius growled, silver eyes flashing.

Snape raised an eyebrow, voice calm. "Care to inform me what that is?"

“Don’t mess around,” James interjected. “We just want to find Lily.”

“As do I, Potter. As hard as it may be for your feeble minds to grasp, I actually do care what happens to Lily. However, I can tell you that the Dark Lord did not take her back.”

“How would you know?” Sirius challenged. “You and him are such great buddies, right?”

“Does the term ‘spy’ mean anything to you, Black?” Snape retorted. “And,” he continued, facing James. “I don’t believe it was anyone at this school.”

James nodded his comprehension. “Who do you think has her then?”

Snape shook his head and scowled. “Maybe a rogue Death Eater. Maybe a rouge Order member. Either way, she is in great danger.”
(2)

With three dozen shrunken bags in her jean pockets, calf-high fuzzy beige boots, a brown and cream shirt, along with a full manicure and feathery shoulder-length hair, Lily was feeling as though all her worries were behind her. She felt like a new person. She looked like a new person. Aria Robyn, crooned her new money.

Lily came to an abrupt halt when she reached a circle of people staring avidly at a man in the center. A cobra met his eyes, swaying with the pipe he played.

Lily narrowed her eyes behind Dior sunglasses and slid to the front. Once the man was safe with the snake back in its straw basket, Lily stepped forward. “Excuse me.”

The man looked up in surprise. “Yes?”

Lily turned to the crowd. “Do you think that’s hard?” she asked them. In response to the general murmur of agreement, Lily turned to the thin man. “How much money did they give you?” she asked him.

“A few hundred, I think,” he replied quietly.

“If I can do it also,” Lily declared, “would you all give me double?”

There was a moment of silence before a blonde man with striking hazel eyes stepped forward. "I'll pay you five hundred if you can do it."

"She's only a girl," came a protest, "Can't be more than eighteen!"

Lily straightened her back and sat cross-legged in front of the basket. "Open it," she ordered.

"Aren't you going to use that instrument?" called a woman.

"I don't need it. I'll just sing."

The snake charmer, obviously dumbfounded, tipped the crate tentatively sideways, jumping backwards when an annoyed black cobra coiled out onto the street. "Always waking me up!" it complained. "Attack the awaker!"

"Greetings," Lily sang in Parseltongue. "How are you today?" The crowd, enthralled, leaned forward.

The snake looked at her in shock. "You can speak?"

"Of course I can, good sir," Lily sang gently.

"How may I help you, snakemistress?" it asked, bowing its head slightly. Lily smiled softly and sang.

The cobra nodded when she had finished her instruction. "Will you set me free if I do that?" it asked suddenly.

Lily paused. "Yes," she said, "I'll buy you and you can live with me."

There was complete silence in the circle other than Lily's singing when the cobra uncoiled itself and moved towards her. The black serpent slowly wound itself up her arm, twisting slowly, dry scales soft on her skin. "Hello brother," said the tattoo as the cobra passed it.

Lily sang small nothings in the serpentine language to keep the crowd entertained as the snake moved slowly upwards. There was a small touch of its tongue on her cheek, then the cobra uncoiled itself and slithered back into its basket.

Once the lid was back on, there was an uproar of applause from the audience. Lily caught a hat someone threw to her and accepted the money that was thrust into it.

“Great job,” said the blonde man, dropping a thick stack of twenties into the hat before striding away.

Once the last few people had put their money in, Lily turned to the snake charmer. “I’ll give you half of this for the snake.”

“What?” he exclaimed. “I no give away Maraj!”

“Oh please,” Lily said, rolling her eyes. “Fine, all the money. There’s at least two grand in here.”

The man paused, then grabbed two handfuls of cash out of the hat and ran off. Lily smirked and grabbed the snake’s basket. “Is your name really Maraj?” she asked it as they slipped through the crowd.

“That is what the dumb man called me, yes,” he replied huffily.

“Is there anything else you’d like to be called?” Lily asked amusedly.

“You choose,” it replied from its basket.

“What about Rey?” There was a disgusted hiss in reply. “Or Onyx?”

“Onyx...” it repeated. “I like it. Call me Onyx.”

Lily smiled softly. “Nice to meet you Onyx. I’m Aria. We both have new names.”

“I like the names,” it said slowly. “Aria and Onyx.”

Lily laughed gently. “Beautiful.”

Edgar stepped out of the elevator, yawning. A two-hour lunch break and then back to work. He stood by the gold fountain, scanning the crowd.

"Happy birthday, bro," Edgar replied. "Where do ya wanna eat?"

"You choose, I'll pay," Edgar replied.

When they got to the dimly lit restaurant, they were seated immediately. Apparently, Paul had already set reservations.

“Oh, I made reservations at every restaurant for the next five blocks. I should probably Floo and tell them we’re not coming...” Paul joked.

“This?” Paul replied, indicating his current outfit. “It’s a suit. It’s what Muggles wear to work.”

Paul shrugged. "I like my suits."

“At least you’re not wearing that ridiculous hat anymore,” Edgar chuckled.

“Hey, I liked that hat. Actually,” Paul said, leaning forward. “Now that you mention that, I have a crazy story to tell you.”

“Here’s your food, sirs,” said the waiter, setting the steaming plates in front of them.

“Thanks,” Edgar said politely. “What kind of crazy story?” he asked Paul.

“I found a Parselmouth yesterday,” Paul confided.

“Really?” asked Edgar, surprised.

“Yeah, I was just heading home when I stopped to watch this snake charmer and—”

“Please, Paul,” said Edgar, rolling his eyes and taking a bite of ravioli. “Those guys are all fake.”

“No, no, let me finish. Then this girl walks up, only, like, eighteen or so, and challenges the old guy.”

Edgar’s mouth dropped open.

“I know, right? Well, she said that if she could do it too, the crowd should pay her double.”

“So, naturally, you ran a diagnostic spell to check for insanity,” Edgar replied slowly, though positively shaking on the inside.

“So, naturally, I offered her five hundred euros if she could prove it.”

“People?”

“Muggle money.”

“Oh.”

“So then she sits down and starts singing to the snake. It was Parseltongue, I know it! I heard it when you brought in that one Death Eater. Anyways, so the snake up and kisses her cheek, then goes back into the cage!”

"You let her walk away?" Edgar moaned.

“Well, that was when I put a Tracking Charm on my hat and gave it to her to put the money in.”

“What did she look like?” Edgar asked quickly.

“She was really well-dressed. Coach, Prada, and Dior all over—which makes me wonder why she wanted more money... Anyways, she looked young, but could have been fifteen to twenty.”

“Her hair, what color was her hair?” Edgar exclaimed.

“Bright red, real unique. I think she—”

“Are you still tracking her?”

“Yes, but—”

“Give me her coordinates,” Edgar said, eyes alight.

[illegible]

Lily approached the woman at the hotel counter. "What restaurant would you recommend if I was looking for a nice dinner?" Lily asked.

The woman smiled the smile she had probably worn all day. “Are you looking for gourmet or something foreign?”

"Gourmet, please," Lily replied, straightening her Armani dress.

“Very good, ma’am. I suggest the Conquistador. It’s a good few blocks away to the left. I’d be happy to arrange you a limo.”

“No, I’ll walk.”

The woman’s smile faltered. “It’s snowing,” she objected gently.

“Lovely,” Lily replied airily, walking out the revolving door.

As the woman said, snow was falling gently to the illuminated streets, casting a beautiful hue on the bland world. Lily pulled her mink-lined cashmere coat around her thin frame and set forth. Above her the stars were twinkling brightly in the areas free of cloud. She thought briefly of how those same stars were over Hogwarts—and Nightshade Mansion—right now also. She shook her head and blinked against a sudden gust of wind.

Passing the corner on which she had taken Onyx, Lily smiled softly. The well-fed cobra was sleeping contentedly on her king bed, a handy charm set to disguise him as a scarf to any wayward maids.

The street containing the Conquistador was packed with bejeweled women on the arm of tuxedoed men, walking beside the windy street or in limos on it.

Lily passed several potential new shopping location, such as Louis Vuitton and a small Egyptian boutique shop. Surely she could find some real magical artifacts there; Egyptian wizards loved charming everything they got their hands on.

A blast of warm air enveloped Lily as she walked into the restaurant. “May I take your coat, ma’am?” inquired a solemn worker.

Lily slipped out of her coat to reveal a sparkling long navy dress with diagonal white stripes gracing the waist. Diamond studded heels clicked as she approached the counter.

“Just one tonight, ma’am?” asked the lady at the desk.

“I’m afraid so,” Lily replied smoothly.

The woman picked up a leather-bound menu. "We have just the thing. If you'll follow me?"

Lily was led into a large room, candlelit with faint Mozart emanating from hidden speakers. The woman pulled out her chair for her and said, "Your waiter will be out in a moment."

Lily nodded graciously, carefully placing the dark napkin on her lap. A boy came behind her and filled her glass from a slender bottle. "Thank you," she murmured. Lily sipped the water, letting the gentle mutterings of surrounding tables wash over her soothingly.

"Hello, my name is Erik and I'll be taking care of you tonight. May I get you anything to drink?" greeted a sharply dressed waiter.

Lily answered quietly, "I'll just have water."

"Of course ma'am." Erik bowed slightly and left her.

Lily gritted her teeth as she drank more water. If another simpering idiot bowed to her she was going to snap and, most likely, reveal all of her stunning abilities. "More water, miss?" asked the waterboy.

"Yes," Lily said. She closed her eyes as he filled up her glass to avoid seeing the inevitable bow. "Thanks," she said when she heard the water stop pouring.

She kept her eyes closed for another minute, then scanned the menu. Deciding immediately, she set the menu to the side, sighing.

"Hello ma'am," greeted the waiter as he returned. "Would you like to hear our specials today?"

"No," Lily replied. "I would like the spinach salad with the balsamic vinaigrette and the stuffed mushrooms."

"As your entrée?"

“Yes please,” Lily finished, closing her eyes again and leaning back in her chair. She listened vaguely to the tables next to her. There was one couple arguing over appetizers next to another couple on their honeymoon. In a corner sat a small family engaged in a verbal game to occupy the children.

Before Lily could listen beyond them, her salad arrived and she devoted her attention to it. Lily picked up the outermost fork to eat—etiquette she learned from dining with the Dark Lord (3)—and slowly ate the salad.

Why rush? She had the rest of her life. Her whole future would be this delicious... and boring. What next? Find a mansion in Canada or America? Hide out forever in fancy restaurants?

The idea wasn't exactly repulsive, though her thoughts drifted to a job. Maybe singing. Isn't that what all the obscenely wealthy Americans did?

[illegible]

Saturday night. D-Day. Alastor rallied his troops and had a final word. “Now, remember the plan. Emmeline says he’s here now and we’ll just slip through his wards with these on,” he said, gesturing to his shoes. “Now, everyone check in.”

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

“Four.”

“Cinco.”

“Six.”

There was a pause. “Eight.”

“Wait,” Alastor interrupted. “Where’s Bones?”

[illegible]

Hearing the rustling of the waiter approaching, Lily pushed her empty salad plate to the side and closed her eyes.

"Hello Lily," said someone who was most definitely not Erik the waiter.

[illegible]

(1) and twittering Slytherins is a sight I'd stay and see, let me tell you.

(2) NOT!

(3) and I learned from Titanic

[illegible]

Only one person guessed her insane shopping spree.

IMPORTANT: She may seem really OOC, but she is running from her guilt and trying to suppress all her emotions and trying to forget her old life. Also, she's in so much shock from the rush of guilt that she would have killed herself if she hadn't pushed it totally out of her mind.

Maybe this cliffhanger will get you to REVIEW!

"Looking good," he said.

"Bones," Lily acknowledged as a chill overtook her.

"Since when have you worn labels?" Bones asked casually.

"You already know," Lily said coolly.

"Yes, actually. Just trying to start a conversation." Bones picked up the dessert menu in the center of the table and skimmed it calmly.

"May I take that?" a waiter asked Lily, gesturing to her plate and setting down her mushrooms.

"Yes," Lily replied, not looking up.

"May I get sir anything?"

"Some Coke, please," Bones answered.

"Coke?" Lily repeated softly as the waiter walked away.

"Yes, my brother got me into it. Delightful drink. Now," Bones leaned in, elbows propped on the table. "What's going on."

Lily didn't answer, meeting his eyes composedly.

Bones sighed. "You need to go back to school."

"And if I say no?" Lily replied icily. "Do you have Aurors or the Order at all the exits?"

"No, they're actually invading Nightshade Mansion at the moment."

Lily froze. "What's the date?" When Edgar just looked at her curiously, she said, "Today's date!"

"January 24," he replied, watching her paling face. "Something wrong?"

“Call them now,” Lily hissed. “Abort.”

Bones looked at her strangely. “Why?”

“You don’t have time, call them now. Trust me.” Lily’s heart was racing in her ears. What is James, Sirius, Remus, Severus, even Tonks were there? They’d be massacred. “Go now!” she urged when he didn’t move.

He jumped to his feet like a startled deer and bolted from the restaurant, knocking over waiters and patrons right and left.

In the ensuing silence, Lily called, "I'll take my check now."

01

A silver dog bounded up to Alastor, whining and shaking its head. “Hold up,” Alastor called to the rest of the team, glaring at Bones’s Patronus. “Let’s wait for Bones, as usual.”

In a few minutes, bones appeared, panting. “Don’t go in!” he gasped. “Call it off now!”

“Huh?”

“Abort, Alastor, abort!” Bones exclaimed. “We can’t go in!”

“We already sent Vance and Shackbolt up to the house,” Alastor said once he comprehended Bones’s words. “They were ready to end this thing and we figured—”

“What?! Call them out right now!”

“Fine...” grumbled Alastor. He touched his wand to his throat. “Abort. Get out of there.”

He put his wand to his ear. A muffled reply sounded, then Alastor put the wand back to his throat. "I don't care. Out now. That's an order, Vance."

Alastor let his wand hang by his side and raised his eyebrows at Bones. "Tell me you have a good reason."

Suddenly there were shouts from the manor's direction and bright flashes of light. "Those had better be fireworks," the Auror growled.

"Everyone!" Bones shouted. "Run back to the Apparation point now!"

There was a scurry as the Order fled back through the woods. Bones stopped next to Alastor. "Coming?" he panted.

There was a scowl set into Alastor's features. "Not without everybody," he replied gruffly.

The shouts were drawing nearer. "I have to see to everyone else," Bones said, taking off through the woods.

Alastor tightened his grip on his wand, preparing for a battle. A group of people crashed through the undergrowth towards him, the two figures in front dressed in solid balack and the others in embroidered dress robes. Alastor dispatched three of the leading Death Eaters then fell in step beside Shacklebolt and Vance, raising a shield to cover their backs.

"Is he okay?" Alastor asked, grabbing Shacklebolt's arm when he saw him limping.

Vance, who was pulling his other arm, said, "They got him with some curse. He's bleeding on this side."

"What's goin' on, Al?" Shacklebolt slurred. "Whur 're we?"

"I'll let the 'Al' go because you're hurt," Alastor growled. "But shut up."

"Yessur," Shacklebolt replied, tripping over both his feet and his tongue. Alastor paused and felt the shield at their back flicker off. The two Aurors pulled Shacklebolt to his feet again.

The Death Eaters, still several yards behind, shot several curses at them, which Vance deflected hastily. "We're getting near the edge of

the wards,” Alastor said. He cast a dark look at Shackbolt. “Been getting into the punch, hasn’t he?” growled Alastor, dragging the black Auror forward. Alastor shot a few Stunners at the approaching crowd, and the duo the next few feet to the Apparation point.

“Side effect of the spell, sir,” said Vance before being enclosed in a dark blue cloud and falling to the loam.

“Aw hell,” Alastor growled, grabbing her arm also and Apparating them away. However, he wasn’t quick enough to avoid one last spell that ripped open his leg and sent him into unconsciousness the moment he landed on it outside of Headquarters.

[illegible]

“Get up Onyx,” Lily said when she entered the hotel room. The cobra looked up at her from the center of the king bed dazedly. “We’re leaving,” she explained. She looked around the room at the array of clothes spread everywhere. “Pack!” she ordered. The room was magically clean, all of her new belongings in the suitcase in the corner.

“What’s wrong, Aria?” Onyx asked, shaking his head to clear it of sleep.

“My past will drop in any minute,” Lily said in hurried Parseltongue. “We’ve got to go now.”

Onyx uncoiled himself and reluctantly slipped off of the bed. "I'm hungry," he complained.

“Later,” Lily said, exasperated. “This is important.”

“So is my stomach,” Onyx said grumpily. “You owe me a long sleep and a big meal for this.”

[illegible]

"I got an anonymous tip saying not to go in," Edgar continued.

"And you just believed them?" Alastor burst, causing Madame Pomfrey, who was attending his leg to shush him. "Idiot," he muttered.

"Well, they were right, weren't they?" he said. "Kingsley and Emmeline could have been killed if they hadn't already been walking out."

"Well, how did your tipper know the Death Eaters were having a party today?" Alastor grumbled.

"It was an initiation ceremony," Edgar corrected. "Death Eaters don't have parties." (1)

"C'mon, Bones. Who was the tipper?" Alastor urged.

"Does the word 'anonymous' mean anything to you?" asked Edgar, rolling his eyes.

"Please, Bones, I've worked with you for over three years. I know that you'd never accept an 'anonymous' tip. Be honest. You found her, didn't you."

"Found who?" Edgar asked innocently. Maybe there was a brain in Alastor's battered skull, he thought, fighting back a smirk.

"You who bloody well who! Evans!" he bellowed.

"If you keep yelling," Madame Pomfrey threatened, "I'm going to send him out and shove a Calming Concoction down your stubborn throat! You'll be lucky to walk again with this injury," she said, gesturing to his shredded leg.

"Where is she?" continued Alastor in a harsh whisper.

"She'll be long gone by now," Edgar admitted.

"Find her again! We need her!" Alastor growled.

“We managed without her before,” Edgar argued. “We can do it without her now.”

“We didn’t get anywhere without her. This war’s going to cost people’s lives. Her happiness is not even on my priority list!”

“Well maybe it should be,” Edgar shouted angrily. “She’s done her part. We shouldn’t put her through more.”

"If you can't stop yelling, just leave!" Madame Pomfrey exclaimed.

“Can you honestly say that her happiness is more important to you than this war?” Alastor narrowed his eyes at Edgar.

Edgar stood up. "If you find her, I won't object. But I'm not going out there to take her back." Fists clenched, Edgar stalked from the room.

[illegible]

Bags and money tucked safely in her belt, Lily ran a lazy hand over her new boat, enjoying the ocean's crisp, if freezing, spray. This could only get her out of sight of the coast. Then she had to hope her plan would work.

The sleek speedboat, christened Sea Eagle, zipped across the water, cutting through the froth and waves. Onyx snoozed on the pale leather seats, enjoying the sun despite the frigid temperature of the splashing water.

Finally reaching a point where she could see no one else, Lily shod her jeans and sweatshirt to reveal a slick black bathing suit with a broad, pocketed, waterproof belt encircling her slim waist.

She turned to Onyx and waved her wand at him, causing him to shrink to about double the size of the Mark on her arm. “Ready?” she asked, tucking him into a magical cage on her belt.

"If I have to be. Just hurry. America has food, right?" Onyx asked.

Lily laughed lightly. “Fast food galore.” She closed and locked Onyx’s cage to ascertain that he couldn’t fall out and dove into the water, wand clutched tightly in her hand.

The glacial ocean knocked the breath out of Lily's body, sending her into a brief state of shock. Teeth chattering, Lily cast a Warming and a Bubble-Head Charm over herself and took a deep breath. Then she pointed her wand at her boat and shrunk it so it would fit in her pocket also.

After stowing her boat and her wand into her belt along with the rest of her belongings, Lily took a few experimental strokes through the water. With a sudden flurry of kicking, the Rosake-Drought infused teenager sped through the water faster than the human eye could follow.

The only thing on her mind was the ocean. Looking down with a preset Goggle Charm, Lily could watch the endless life of the sea pulsing beneath her.

The bright colors and chaotic serenity of the ocean kept Lily's mind blissfully clear throughout the whole day. In fact, it took her an hour past dusk to realize that the sun had set. She stopped, pulled the boat and her wand out from her pocket and enlarged the boat.

The gentle rocking of the ocean beneath her body sent her quickly to sleep.

[illegible]

“She checked out of her hotel Saturday night,” Shacklebolt reported. “Took everything and left. She was under the pseudonyms of Mr. Levi Smith and his daughter.”

“As two people?” asked Alastor, looking up at the Auror from where he was confined in bed. “Please.”

“We checked the security tapes at the hotel—useful things, they are. First Mr. Smith checks in a black cloak. Leaves the next morning. Daughter, Evans, comes back to the hotel in his stead.”

“Did she tell anyone where she was headed?” Alastor asked, leaning back in the bed.

“Not that we know of. We’re currently checking the tapes at all the local stores,” Shacklebolt replied.

“Thank you, Shackbolt,” Alastor said, pulling his pillow up behind him to make himself more comfortable. “Any theories?”

“She’ll leave the country. Not by Apparation because we can track that too easily, and not by plane, unless she manages to get a fake ID and passport. My guess is Floo. We need to keep someone in that Department.”

“Good idea,” Alastor said. “Get someone on it.”

Kingsley nodded and turned to leave. Then he turned back. "How are you feeling?" he asked, suddenly warm.

Alastor cast a dark look at his limp left leg. “Been better,” he grunted.

[illegible]

“Report,” Voldemort hissed.

“Milord, we found a man on the streets who saw a red-haired girl.”

“Where is he?” asked the Dark Lord.

“Outside this chamber, my lord,” replied Avery.

“Bring him in.”

“What is this?” whimpered the skinny man as he was thrown on the floor.

"Untie our guest, Avery," Voldemort drawled. "Don't you have any manners?"

Avery scurried forward and untied the worn ropes.

"Now, Avery tells me that you say a girl with red hair and green eyes. Tell me about her."

"I will if you let me go," said the man hurriedly. "I tell everything if free."

"That wasn't a request," Voldemort scowled. "That was an order. Obey. Then you can go."

"She come up and say 'I charm snakes too.' Gets money from crowd and takes Maraja and go. I know no more."

"Is that really all? Well Avery, go ahead and kill him."

"No!" the street performer exclaimed. "I remember more. Just remember."

"Yes?" the wizard asked silkily.

"A man came by later, a tall man. Asked for same girl. I tell him restaurant and he runs off after her."

"Describe him."

"Tall brown hair. Uh, gray eyes. Tall. Nice suit," the man stuttered.

"No name?"

"Bone. Edward Bone."

"One more thing, then you'll leave. What did the girl say to the snake?"

"She sing strange song."

“For example...”

“Manaha-hasessesssss,” the man blurted, eyes rolling in his head with fear. “Sssssassinth.”

"Thank you," Voldemort said. He turned to Avery. "Kill him."

000

"Sun up," hissed a voice.

Lily opened her eyes to find the shrunken Onyx on her stomach. "Thank you," she muttered in his language.

Lily rose and checked the ship's GPS system. Halfway there... "We'll be in America by midnight," Lily told the snake, who looked pleased at the notion. She reshrunk her boat, stowed it hurriedly in her pocket, thinking only of the trip ahead.

The ocean was the color of the sky above; pale blue and ethereally beautiful. Lily began swimming, trying to leave her mind and worries in the middle of the Atlantic. A group of dolphins twisted under her. She slowed, matching their pace as they jumped and twirled around her, inviting her to join in their play. After almost a few minutes, or hours, for time is hard to determine in the ocean, Lily took off.

When darkness fell around her again, she decided that she was too close to her destination to stop swimming. Soon the redhead was ducking under boats in the dark waters and listening to the Muggle airplanes zip by overhead.

Finally Lily reached a deserted shoreline, slightly panting. She collapsed onto the cool beach, feeling the pale sand engulf her weary limbs. All her worries were gone!

“Now I go back big,” Onyx reminded her when she lazily opened his pocket. She nodded and patted the side of her belt ... only to find an empty latch. Panic flared in Lily when she comprehended what had happened. Where was her wand?

Lily nodded cautiously. Lily smirked. Lily sighed softly. "Look, Lily." Lily sighed. Lily shrugged. "Lily! "Severus!" Lily cursed. Lily scowled. Lily shrugged. Lily froze. "Lily—"

Lily sighed. "Severus!" "Lily!" Lily hissed, furious. "Lily Evans!" "Lily..." Lily sighed. "Lily—" "Lily!" "Lily." "Lily..." "Lily?" "Lily?" "Lily!" Lily blinked. "Lily!" "Severus?" "Hurry, Lily." "Severus?" "Severus?" "Lily?" Lily giggled. Lily? Lily spat. Lily asked. Lily asked. Lily shrugged. Lily sighed. Lily drawled. "Lily!" Lily sighed. Lily asked. Lily rose slower. Lily blinked. Lily exclaimed. Lily smiled gently. Lily paused. Lily smiled softly. Lily asked. "No," Lily replied. Lily replied icily. Lily froze.

So I had to manually create a better one in chronological order:

Lily's brother Robin sacrificed his life to save her from a car.

Lily was taken by Voldemort when she was eleven after he killed her parents.

She learned how to become both a Stunner (someone with an extremely potent Stunning spell) and a Dark adept (able to use Dark Magic effectively.)

Now that she can use Occlumency, Lily can block out Voldemort from hearing her rebellious thoughts, so he thinks she likes him and adopts her using the ark of Salazar.

She becomes friends with Severus Snape in her seventh year summer who also dislikes Voldie.

The 7th year Death Eaters find out who she is.

James and the Marauders except Peter find out who she is.

Severus becomes Dumbledore's spy without telling Lily.

While in the Forbidden Forest teaching Severus when they are both attacked by Remus, but they use an Instant Portkey to get away.

They reappear in the library and Lily Stuns Filch, giving her away as the Stunner.

They search the school for the Stunner, not knowing that its Lily.

Severus sees that being the Stunner is killing Lily, so he turns her in.

She spends Christmas break at Order HQ, getting interrogated meanly by Moody and nicely by Edgar Bone, whose fiancé is a loser named Sara.

While there, Lily gets hurt, which makes Sev mad. He slips her Rosake Drought, which eventually gives her temporary super-powers.

She goes back to Hogwarts, and meets Voldie, who is mad that she disappeared.

He sets up an engagement between her and Rabastan Lestrangle.

Lily finds out that she can talk to her Mark of Salazar, who enlists her help to fight Voldie on the orders of Salazar Slytherin.

On a snowy Hogsmeade day, Lily stays at the castle with Tonks and the Marauders and has fun. That day her roommate, Jessica Fairfield is killed in a DE attack.

Lily feels guilty, tells Bones the location of DE HQ and runs away from Hogwarts. She gets a king cobra named Onyx.

Bones finds out where she is through his brother, then gets a tip from her that the Order is about to be killed when they invade the DE HQ. They all get away safely except Moody, who loses most use of his leg.

Right now she just swam across the Atlantic, but accidentally dropped her wand in the ocean. Oops.

Back to the story.

[illegible]

Lily jumped to her feet and looked over the vast ocean, the consuming flame of panic in her mind.

She couldn't survive without her wand, her magic! Then, an icy certainty washed over her. She had avoided it at all costs, fighting to leave the darkness behind her.

Lily close her eyes and spread out her arms. The magical well within her burned, eager to be used again. My wand, she thought. Tendrils of smoke began snaking through her hair as the Dark Magic slithered from her. My wand.

Words sprang unbidden to her lips. “Magic to magic, darkness to darkness, I call forth the focuser of my powers from the very depths of Hell. Bring forth my wand,” she urged. A wind began whipping around her and her eyes turned black. The calm sea began to writhe and move, pulsing with her heart.

She didn't know how long she stood like that, unseeing face to the sea, but she snapped out of her trance when the smooth wood of her wand met her hand.

The smoke and dark clouds above dissipated, leaving Lily standing in the bright sunshine of morning. She grasped her wand tightly in her hand and looked down at Onyx, who was looking up at her silently. "I'll re-grow you later," she said, dazed from the Dark Magic. She swiftly put Onyx in her belt and turned around.

A group of people, Muggles if their attire was anything to go by, was standing at the edge of the beach, staring at her fearfully.

There was a sudden blanket of pale light over them and they started talking casually to each other, no longer watching her. In the next minute Lily found herself being escorted away at wandpoint.

[illegible]

Severus closed his eyes, sighing with relief as he crumbled the slip of parchment in his hand. 'Safe,' read Potter's scrawl. Severus wasn't

sure whether that meant caught by the Order or let free, but he truly didn't care as long as she was all right. And away from Him.

As though reading his mind—which, due to vigilant Occlumency, he most definitely was not—Rudolphus leaned across the table. “Any news on the latest escape?”

Severus shook his head. “Not yet,” he lied smoothly.

Rudolphus schooled and tore off a piece of his sandwich. “She'd better be back soon.”

Severus shrugged lightly. “He can't get much angrier.”

“Not that,” Rudolphus growled. He looked from side to side. “The wedding.”

“You and Bellatrix?” Severus muttered, masking his confusion by taking a sip of his pumpkin juice.

‘No. Evans and Rabastan.’

Severus choked on his drink. He used a small spell to clear his throat and croaked, “Pardon?”

“The D—He wanted a good match for the Stunner,” Rudolphus confided. He looked down to where Rabastan was laughing with his buddies, stroking his newly grown goatee every minute or so. “The Lestranges are exceedingly pure. I just think he got the wrong one of us.”

“I'm sure he didn't want to split you and Bellatrix. You've been engaged since birth, correct?” Severus asked, trying not to burst into a rage.

Rudolphus shrugged and his eyes darted to where the haughty Bellatrix sat, not replying.

“He knows best,” Severus said, returning to his food with a mask over his furious eyes.

“You have absolutely no right to hold me here,” Lily said, making sure her accent was neutral.

Lily had been interrogated enough to keep silent about that. To be honest, American Aurors even looked the same as British. With the exception of Moody, all Aurors tended to have impeccable hair and intimidating poses.

The woman cut in. “Officer Weseman’s just being nice. Yo’ either going to tell us now or yo’ going to tell us later. Yo’ only what, eighteen? Ye don’t know the rules of the big bad world. I got news; this ain’t some gossip secret. We need yo’ name and yo’ country. Now.”

“Or inject Veritaserum,” the woman added.

“Louis Vuitton clothes, Dior, Coach, a boat, a sn—” She looked up, nose flared. “You had a cobra in your pocket?”

The man shrugged and turned to face Lily. “Anything you’d like to say before we lock you up?”

"Is the fountain running?" she asked quietly.

The man frowned, but the woman's face froze behind him.

Looking bewildered, Weseman motioned for her to stand, pulling out handcuffs. “No,” the woman objected. “Give me a few minutes with her.”

“You know—”

“Please, I’m the best. I’ll be fine.” The man nodded cautiously and left the room.

“Is the fountain running...?” the woman repeated slowly. “Not at the moment. Yo’ not as important as we’re making out.”

Suspicious, Lily said, "Name two."

"You name two," the woman challenged.

The two women were locked in a battle of wills, but the cop gave in first. “Well, there’s the D-man, obviously,” she said, “and that one’s who’s always so moody.”

“Before you get me into the American legal system, you want to call one of them,” Lily advised.

The woman paused, then left the room. Ten minutes later Lily was re-strapping her belt with Onyx, finally enlarged, around her neck. The woman, an Order agent name Grant as Lily found out, nodded to her as Lily left the building. "Edgar told me you were safe," she muttered. "Don't prove him wrong."

[illegible]

Marissa Grant jotted a note down about the capture and release of the Order girl. She could hardly believe that Dumbledore had sunk to the level of recruiting a student.

The door to her office creaked open and Weseman's easily identified footfalls neared her small desk. Marissa set aside her quill and folded her paper. "Yes?" she asked shortly.

He didn't answer, something quite rare. "Cat got cha tongue?" she joked, looking up.

There was a strange look in his eyes; a mix of fear and desperation. "Where's the girl?" he asked. His voice was flatter than she had ever heard it. He was normally so perky.

"Why?" she asked, eyebrows furrowed. "You okay?"

"Just tell me where she is. I'm not joking."

"I noticed," Marissa replied. Her hands drifted to her wand. "She's gone."

His face tightened. "Where?"

"Dunno. Listen Eseman, tell me what's wrong. I can help," Marissa soothed.

"No you can't," Weseman said, panting. "No one can." His wand was suddenly pointing at her face. "Tell me now."

Thinking back to her conversation with Edgar Bones, she said, "The girl was part of a British intelligence agency. They're on our side, it's okay."

Weseman looked furious. "Your side maybe. You work for the Order of the Phoenix, don't you?" he accused suddenly.

"Wait, Weseman, hold—"

"Avada Kedavra!"

Sorry it was short. Thought I should update though.

Lily decided that Virginia was the most beautiful area she had ever seen. Soft mountains guarded her, the air was crisp, and magic was free. However, Bones knew she was here, so she'd have to move on.

“Montana’s where ya’ll wanna go,” suggested a souvenir shop cashier. “Nice and open. You and yer group can go thur.”

Lily left the shop grateful, but with ears grated by the harsh Southern accent.

"I heard ye in there," said an elderly man, standing by the door. "Running from You-Know-Who?"

Lily regarded him without speaking.

The man shrugged under her scrutiny. “Most Brits are, and only wizards would walk around a place like this wearing that,” he said, gesturing to her designer outfit. Seeing that she wasn’t going to respond, he leaned closer. “Most of them go to a big colony in Salem. Think it’s funny—ironic like. I’d head there.” He winked and limped away.

Lily inspected her chipped nail polish and murmured to her two- and three-dimensional serpent companions, “I know where we’re not going, then.”

There were dual hisses of agreement.

[illegible]

“Ginger snap?” Dumbledore asked cheerily.

Severus looked at the proffered candies in distaste. “No thank you, Headmaster.”

Dumbledore sighed and leaned back in his chair. “Have you had any correspondence with Miss Evans?”

“No sir. Have you?”

“Not exactly. Professor Bones spoke briefly with her in London, but she’s vanished again,” Dumbledore answered readily.

“And she’s safe?”

“From what Professor Bones would see, yes. Now, Mister Snape, I need to ask you why she left. Was she all right?”

“As much as usual,” Severus replied evasively. He really didn’t want to give away things she didn’t want known. Though the feeling was, apparently, no longer mutual, Lily was Severus’s best friend.

“That doesn’t help, Mister Snape, and you know it,” Dumbledore said, eyes twinkling in amusement.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Severus said delicately. “I shouldn’t say more.”

“But you know more,” Dumbledore said. “Severus, you do realize why you are a spy, correct?” At Severus’s silence, he said, “We need you to give us information to help win this war.”

Angered, Severus stared stoically at the wall above the Headmaster’s head. “If you don’t help us,” Dumbledore said seriously, a resigned flavor in his voice, “we won’t have much evidence in your favor should you get arrested.”

Severus felt the blood drain from his face and he tried to calm his breathing.

“Could you give me a few reasons why she might have run?” Dumbledore asked, pleasant tone back.

Though he hated to admit it, Severus was intimidated. “I’m sure you already know it all,” Severus stalled.

“Please tell me anyways.”

"She probably felt guilty about Fairfield," Severus offered. The Headmaster nodded for him to continue. "The Dark Lord probably did something that scared her," he said tentatively.

"You were there, correct?" Dumbledore verified.

"At first," Severus admitted, "but when she revealed herself we were all sent away."

"What did Voldemort do? Surely you found out somehow," Dumbeldore said calmly.

"Well, I'm sure the Cruciartus was employed at some point," Severus muttered.

Dumbledore frowned slightly. "I don't think so," he said, "she didn't mention that."

"Why would she?" Severus challenged. He regained his calm demeanor. "What did you ask?"

"Why, what had happened, of course. Everything important," Dumbledore said, oblivious to the point Severus was making.

"She obvi- She didn't think it was important," Severus told him. "How would that affect the war? It wouldn't stop you from making her go in again." There was a bitter sting in Severus's last words. They had promised not to make her a spy, but she had sent in and hurt anyways.

"I'll look into that. Anything else?" Dumbledore asked, shuffling a paper on his desk.

Severus paused. "He also... He also announced her engagement."

Dumbledore's froze. "Pardon?" He met Severus's eyes. "Surely she would have told us that."

"Let's go," groaned the second. "She'll be in Brazil by now."

"Nuh uh," objected the first. "I wanna eat my fries." Lily closed her eyes. Should she risk drawing attention to herself by leaving? Or should she let them walk right by her? "Besides," the man continued, "if the Order did get her, she'd be back in England."

“Take the fries wit ya,” said the second, irritated.

The two rose and trudged towards the door. Lily busied herself by squeezing ketchup packets onto her plate.

“Hey!” said the second. Lily looked up cautiously. An enormous man was looking down at her, scrutinizing her. “Can I have a few of those?” he asked, gesturing to her abundant ketchup packs.

"Go ahead," she said, smiling weakly.

“Thanks,” he said. “Hey, Joe, wait up!” He hurried to catch up to his partner.

"He is an idiot," the Mark mentioned once he was out of the door.

Lily had to agree.

[illegible]

Lily strolled through the house: one bedroom, one bathroom, in a nice, small Muggle town. All the necessities were there. So why was she so unsure?

Don't stop, said a voice in her mind. Her own voice, for once. Run.

Lily slinked back into her sleek car and slammed the gas pedal.

Onyx, well fed if the lump in his middle was anything to go by, looked up, disgruntled by the sudden motion. "Not here?" he asked.

"No," Lily replied off-handedly. "A little farther."

"N-n-no, m-milord," he stammered, sinking into a bow.

“Crucio!” Voldemort watched the man writhe on the grass, a smile twitching at his pale lips. When the spell wore off, Duff was sobbing. “Don’t cry,” Voldemort said, disgusted. “Crucio!”

Finally the man settled for screaming. “Good,” Voldemort murmured. He turned back to the Hogwarts students. “This is what awaits you should the Stunner not be at my side in one weeks side. Dismissed.”

[illegible]

America did have quite a variety of climate. After a sweltering ride through an endless desert, Lily and her serpentine companions were in the dense city of Phoenix.

Street lights flickered under the bright stars overhead, illuminating the slight girl in the silver BMW. She was suppressing yawns; she'd have to pull over and sleep soon.

Sitting at a red light, Lily looked sideways as a car revved its engine. The teenager in front grinned at her and raised his eyebrows, smacking his lips.

Lily raised an eyebrow and revved her engine in return. "To the next stoplight," she called to him.

His grin widened and his grin widened. "Let's go, babe," he replied.

The light turned green and they were off, streaks on the road.

Hood down and red hair streaming over the back of her silver car, Lily felt quite free. Adrenaline raced through her veins as she flew by the other cars, barely avoiding hitting one van.

The other car stayed near her, but the boy looked furious as the reached the next light with her in the lead.

She stopped on the other side of the light, smirking. He fishtailed and skidded to a halt next to her. “Sweet ride,” he said. “Wanna go again?”

[illegible]

“You are dismissed, Weseman,” Lord Voldemort said. The man bowed, quaking, and Disapparated.

Voldemort paused, and then cursed a nearby tree into a million pieces. So that was it! The Order had smuggled Velisna out of school, then, when she tried to escape and reach to him with Dark magic, she had been captured by American Aurors and given back to the Order!

Voldemort growled and picked up a leftover mask, ripping it apart. They would pay.

[illegible]

The Pacific really wasn't that great, Lily pondered at its edge. All cliffs and seals. Maybe she'd go back across the States. Or maybe into Canada. Or down to Brazil. Her options were limitless; except for return to Europe. The thought of her home country made the open wound of Fairfield's death throbbed horribly and Lily put a hand to her heart, trying to contain her own wild feelings.

She shook her head, grabbed Onyx (who had been eyeing the seals hungrily) and jumped back into her car. Keep running.

The Prophet the next morning held morbid news— almost a dozen dead in a Muggle town in southern England. Edgar shook his head and set the paper on his desk.

"We need her back," said a gruff voice from inside the fireplace. "She'd have known where it was."

"I know, Alastor," Edgar said, closing his eyes. "I just wish she had had more time."

"I wish those Muggles had had more time, too," Moody replied. "Now go get her. It's a Saturday—no school. Get out there now. I know you know where she is, even if she doesn't know you know."

Edgar sighed and faced the Auror. “No time like the present, eh?”

Moody, head illuminated by the emerald flames, said, “Right,” and disappeared.

Edgar tossed a pinch of Floo powder into the flames. After a moment, his brother stuck his head through. “Hey Eddie,” he greeted.

“Don’t call me that,” Edgar reminded him. “Can I have some more coordinates?”

"I don't even get a hello. Fine, here, wait a second," Paul said, withdrawing.

He handed a parchment through to Edgar after a few minutes and stuck his head back in. “Those are in America,” he told Edgar. “She moves a lot, eh?”

“Yeah,” Edgar agreed, not listening. “Hey, thanks,” he said, terminating the connection despite his brother’s protests.

He took a deep breath and gathered what he needed from his office in case she didn't agree to come quietly.

[illegible]

Lily headed downstairs to grab some of the more appetizing tidbits of the continental breakfast to take back upstairs to share with Onyx. The hotel had not been as fine as the others; the bed was a little musty and the television had horrid reception, but she was well-rested in both mind and body.

As she turned a corner, she froze upon hearing a familiar voice. "...yes, about this height. She might have used the pseudonym Smith." Lily saw Bones talking to the worker behind the front desk, posed casually. She spun back around the corner and flattened herself against the wall.

"We do keep customer confidentiality," replied the teenage worker tentatively. "I'm not supposed to—"

"I work with the British government," Bones cut in swiftly. "This is a terrorist we're talking about."

"Her?" exclaimed the boy.'

"So you did see her," Bones said earnestly. "Give me her room number."

Don't, Lily pleaded silently. Don't. Please. I was so close...

"Why should I believe you?" said the boy bravely, though his voice broke. "She was nice. Besides, foreign police have no say here. Leave n-now, before I call our police,"

Lily strained to hear, ears sub-consciously becoming those of her Animagus wolf. Go on, Lily urged in her mind. Call the coppers. Go on.

"Listen," Bones said. She could just imagine his bright, honest expression as he leaned in for the kill. "Not only would you be protecting your country, but there's also a price on her head. Half would go to you."

“You’re a bounty hunter!” the boy exclaimed, though he was sounding more interested than horrified. Call the cops.

“I’m a cop. Just a British one. Call in your police if you feel like it. Just give me the room.”

There was a pause. Don’t do it... “It’s 419,” said the boy tensely. “But if she doesn’t answer, don’t go breaking in. You don’t have a war—Hey, wait up!”

Footsteps were pounding towards Lily’s hallway. She bolted, adrenaline and Rosake Drought rushing through her veins. The combined strength had her on the fourth floor before Bones had reached the first.

She struggled to get the card into the lock, glancing over her shoulder every few seconds. The red lights above the lock continued to deny her entrance. “Onyx!” she called through the door. “Are you in there?”

At first there was no answer and Lily was keeping her eyes on the stairwell three doors away. “Yes,” Onyx said finally. “What?”

“Onyx, get away from the door,” Lily said urgently. She gave him five seconds, then kicked in the door. Shards flew across the room, covering it in a layer of wood dust. “Onyx?” Lily said, worried he hadn’t moved in time.

The black cobra slid out from the bathroom to her. Sighing, Lily moved forward and picked him up. “Hold tight to my neck,” she told him, stuffing her shrunken suitcases into her jean pocket. As Onyx latched to her neck, she turned to the door.

Edgar was leaning against the shattered doorway, calm as undisturbed lake. “Good morning,” he greeted smoothly.

Should she run now or give him a chance to speak? Maybe he wasn’t there to make her go back. Maybe.

“Lily, we need you,” he said, taking a step forward. “Come back.”

Lily turned on her heel and was at the window in a millisecond. She cast him one last look before diving out of the window and hitting the ground before the glass shards. A Stunning spell shot out overhead, but she was already in her car and slamming in the keys. She tore out of the parking lot in a silver blur.

Once she was away from the hotel, Lily moved a hand up to pull the frozen Onyx from her neck. Her fingers came away red. "Onyx?" she exclaimed fearfully. She pulled him off to find his lengthy body covered in blood and glass shards from the window. "Are you all right?"

Onyx fell limply into the seat beside her. “It hurts, sister. Make it stop...”

[illegible]

Edgar looked out of the window, eyes helplessly following the course of the silver car. He'd have to follow quickly to catch her.

“Someone,” said an infuriated voice from behind him, “has to pay for this.” A man with a badge reading ‘Manager’ scowled at Edgar as his three bodyguards looked around the wood covered room in amazement.

Edgar, casting another glance at the speeding car, sighed. “Reparo,” he intoned, waving his wand around the room. As everything hopped back in place before the Muggles’ amazed eyes, Edgar turned his wand on them. “Obliviate!”

When he turned back to the window, the silver car had vanished.

[illegible]

"I'm sorry, but we don't have anyone who treats snakes here."

"A cobra? No, I'm sorry."

“Are you joking?”

“Our expert’s on vacation at the moment, may I take a message?”

Lily rushed into the next location on the phonebook page she had acquired. The small zoo was near silent, with faint splashing coming from one cage and howling from another. Quickly finding the long staff building, Lily entered, hand stroking Onyx’s battered body. A man with silver-streaked black hair looked up as she entered. “May I help you?” he asked politely, though looking confused at the late night visitor. “I was just about to close up, you see and—”

“Do you have anyone who could help me? I have a hurt snake—”

The man held up a hand to calm her. “I’m the snake expert here. What’s wrong?” he asked, not noticing that the patient was wrapped around Lily’s neck.

Lily unwound Onyx and set him gently on the desk, brushing side the phone and a few papers. “A window shattered and...”

The man’s eyes widened and he stood quickly and took a step away from the desk. “Why isn’t it in a cage? Miss, that is a dangerous animal!”

“I know!” she exclaimed, exasperated. “I don’t care! Can you help him or not?” Her hair was ruffled from her constantly running a hand through it and her emerald eyes were alive with worry. The whole world was after her and her only friend in the country was dying.

The man began inspecting Onyx, cautiously running expert hands along with open wounds. “I’ll see what I can do,” he said finally. “But I was just about to close up, so I’m the only one here. I may need some of your help to hold him down without my assistants. All right, I just need your insurance card and your permit.”

She didn’t speak, eyes focused on her friend. “Should I bite him?” asked Onyx weakly, raising his head to look at her.

Fighting back a smile, she murmured, "No, no. He's going to help us," Lily assured him

Lily looked back at the zoo worker, who was scrutinizing her with narrowed eyes. "You do have a permit to have this animal, don't you?" he said suspiciously, stepping back from the cobra. "If not, I'm afraid I can't work on this snake."

Seething, Lily said, "If you do not help him, he'll die. I'll pay you as much as you want."

"I'm sorry," the man said, picking up the telephone, "but I have to report you—"

"You dial a single number and you will die," Lily growled, wand to his head in a moment.

Slowly the man put the receiver down. "Don't do anything you'll regret," he said soothingly, trying to look sideways at what she had pressed against his head.

"Oh, I won't," Lily reassured him. "Now help him."

The zoo worker spoke steadily. "We'll need to go to the ER. All of my supplies are in there."

Lily nodded briskly and told Onyx to wrap around her free arm. He did so weakly and Lily bit her tongue when she felt him smear blood across her arm. "Lead the way," she instructed the man, wand still against his temple.

The moment they exited the office and entered a small, white corridor, he swung around, fist aimed for her face. Lily caught it with the arm Onyx was on and scowled. "Didn't your mother ever tell you not to hit a girl?"

She used her wand to send him into the nearest wall. He got up quickly, though his eyes were wide. "Back down," he said.

Lily groaned. "This is wasting time, you bloody idiot! Rictumsempra!" The Muggle spun backwards into the wall again. Before he could get up again, she had her wand inches from his left eye. "You don't know what I can do," she warned. "Help me and you'll be fine. Now get up," she ordered, stepping back.

"Did you have to move your arm?" groaned Onyx, tightening himself on her as they moved forwards again.

"Sorry," Lily apologized. "He was asking for it."

"You'll be all right," the Mark assured the cobra since they were sharing her arm. "This Muggle has knowledge. It's in his eyes."

"You know what else is in his eyes?" Lily snarled as they entered the emergency surgery room. "He's planning to try an escape again. And he thinks I'm loony."

"Muggles..." the Mark hissed, in a voice full of contempt.

"Here we are," the man said unnecessarily. "Put your snake on the table."

"Go ahead," Lily said to Onyx, holding her arm beside the table. "Don't bite him unless I tell you to."

As the snake's long body hit the operating table, he hissed, "Cold..." A shudder ran the five foot length of the cobra as he tried to situate himself comfortably on the metal table.

"Colloportus," Lily muttered a few times, locking every exit. "Now," she said, turning back to the doctor. "You needed my assistance?"

"Hand me the tweezers, needles, string and scissors," he instructed, looking over Onyx again. He walked to a silver sink and washed his hands methodically. Lily set the supplies on the table, gripping her wand in one hand. He came back to the metal table with a jar of white salve and pulled a small blue mask over his strong face.

"What are you going to do, Doctor...?" Lily asked, inspecting the tools.

“Hans,” he supplied.

“Doctor Hans,” Lily repeated, petting Onyx’s forehead lightly.

“First I’ll disinfect the wounds, then stitch them up,” he listed mechanically, pulling on a pair of white gloves.

“Have all the tools been well cleaned?” she asked, inspecting the needle closely.

He nodded. “I believe so, though we haven’t had any surgeries recently.”

“Scourgify,” Lily muttered, wand to the thin needle. Frothy soap covered it, then was rinsed away. “There,” she said, setting it back down. “Begin.”

The vet worked in silence for a few minutes, then commented, “This is a fine specimen. Recently fed, correct?” Lily nodded, watching as the needle deftly closed up one of the bigger gashes. “Not fed much before that though, correct?”

There was a pause. “Did that man feed you?” Lily asked Onyx softly, feeling fury boil inside of her. She ought to go back to England and kill that sleazy excuse for a snake charmer.

“Sometimes,” the snake replied dazedly, as a numbing needle had already slowed his thoughts. “He needed me.”

Lily ran a tender thumb across his black forehead. “That’s right,” she told Doctor Hands. “Before I got him,” she added.

“Hmmm,” said the man, focusing back on his work for a moment. He finished off the cut and moved to the next. “Does it—can it still bite?” he asked, his eyes alight.

“If he wants to,” Lily replied easily.

The man didn’t look up. “Why hasn’t he bitten me yet, Miss…?”

“Maybe he likes you,” she growled warningly.

The man chuckled softly. “That would make one of you.” He shook his head gently. “You’re not going to tell me your name?” Lily didn’t bother answering the question. “So,” he began casually, “where’d you learn to talk to him?”

“I didn’t learn,” Lily said calmly. “It was rather... sudden.”

“Tell him something,” the man suggested, voice still casual.

Lily sighed, deciding to humor him. “For example...”

“Make him move his tail.”

Lily leaned in to Onyx’s face. “Could you move your tail? Back and forth once or twice.”

Onyx nodded feebly and twitched his tail before slumping back down. “Fascinating,” said the man. “And he does whatever you say?”

“If he wants to,” Lily replied with a shrug, watching as stitched up his back. She handed him the scissors when he gestured for them. “He trusts me.”

“We should bandage the rest,” said Doctor Hans. “Would you give me that?” he said, gesturing to a roll of white linen.

Lily did so and ran a finger over onyx’s head again. “How are you holding up?” she asked him softly.

Onyx hissed, “I am well, but I have been better.”

“He’ll be done with you in a mo,” Lily told him. Turning back to the doctor, she was he was wrapping most of Onyx’s body in the fabric.

“What’d you say just then?” Hans asked. “Not to bite me, I trust.”

“Just asking how he was,” Lily answered. “Which is fine, thanks to you.”

“Tell him he’s welcome,” the doctor said, smiling slightly. As Lily relayed the message, Hans watched the movement of her lips and she listened to him try to repeat her words softly.

“Add more of a hiss to it. Ackasssh narazha,” she said clearly.

He tried again, accurate enough to get a surprised reaction from Onyx. “Thank you,” he said to Lily, eyes alive with the light of a man gaining knowledge.

Lily collected Onyx and draped him around her neck before shaking Hans's hand, moving her wand to her other hand. "Here," she said, handing him a stack of green paper.

He took it, looking uncomfortable. “All of it?”

"For the trouble," Lily explained. "Sorry for hurting you."

He touched the back of his much-abused head. "That's all right," he said. "Thanks for teaching me that."

Lily smiled openly. “Of course.” She aimed her wand quickly. “Obliviate!”

[illegible]

“Who is she?” Paul finally burst after relaying another set of coordinates.

Edgar looked appraisingly at his brother. "You don't want to get involved," he warned. "Forget about her."

"I can't when you call me every day for her location," Paul retorted. "Just a brief overview, please."

Edgar paused. “Let’s just say that whoever catches her will probably win the war.”

Paul paled. “You mean,” he looked from side to side, “Death Eaters are out there too?” he whispered.

Edgar nodded. “I saw a guy with a thousand Galleons bounty on his head yesterday. I would have arrested him then and there but there were Muggles everywhere.”

Paul shook his head. "I told you not to get involved in the war. What'll I do when you get yourself killed?"

Edgar smiled. “Call Gringotts to see if you made it into my will?” he suggested cheekily. Paul laughed along with him. “Thanks for the help, bro,” Edgar said, pulling back from the emerald flames.

[illegible]

Lily slipped her tan sunglasses over her eyes as the sun escaped from the snow-capped mountains on either side of her. Onyx, wrapped in a thick plaid blanket in the passenger's seat, muttered, "Where are we?" in a sleep-laden voice. A spell made a heat lamp hover directly over him to ensure he was warm.

“Colorado,” Lily told him. “How are you feeling?”

Onyx let out a small hiss. “Dizzy. What happened?”

Lily used one hand to tighten the cashmere scarf on her neck against the frigid air. “You got hurt so I took you to a doctor. Does anything hurt?”

Onyx tried to raise up to look at Lily, but fell back into the blanket. “Everything,” he moaned, “when I move, at least.”

“Don’t move,” Lily instructed. “Are you warm enough?” she asked, glaring at a snow pile on the edge of the road as though it had done her a great personal wrong.

“Light’s nice...” mumbled Onyx before going back to sleep.

Lily slowed slightly to turn a sharp corner, then sped up again. Without Onyx to talk with her and occupy her thoughts, her thoughts began to drift to Jessica Fairfield. Guilt gripped her stomach, making her physically flinch. Another death on her shoulders. She gritted her teeth and pushed the gas pedal farther down, leaving her thoughts behind.

Your fault, your fault! taunted her mind. Eyes wild, she urged the car to move even faster. Watching her speedometer push 120, she didn’t notice the sharp curve of the mountain road directly ahead.

“Where’re we now?” grumbled a Death Eater. “Just take the Portkey, says ‘e.’”

The market was bustling with people, packed in the street like sardines, each fighting for a bit of extra profit. The Death Eaters went unnoticed by the hurrying natives, which gave them the ability to look around and inspect the nearest people. Of course, they still had no clue who they were looking for, other than the fact it was a girl and one of tremendous power. One learned quickly to follow orders when given, even if those orders were incomprehensible.

The other looked around at a dingy shop sign nearby. He ran a confused hand through his greasy blonde hair. “Dunno,” he replied to his partner, “I don’t read Chinese.”

[illegible]

Lily's breath caught when her new BMW drove straight off the mountain edge, sending her and her serpentine companion hurtling to the unforgiving rock bottom below.

However, she hadn't trained every summer for the past six years for nothing.. Adrenaline, and most likely the Rosake Drought, slowed time down for the Stunner. Everything became vividly clear: the crisp gray sky over the serrated horizon; the gently sleeping cobra in the passenger seat; her beige scarf and the bitter wind slapping her pale face; the approaching ground.

Before her mind could give her body instructions on how to react, she had scooped Onyx and his blanket up in her arms and kicked out her door. Lily leapt from the car, using her arms to form a shield over the cobra, and rolled down the jagged, snow-covered edge of the mountain while the silver car continued on its way down before crashing on the rough ground.

She came to a halt on a small ledge halfway down the mountain, lying on her back and staring, panting, up at the ashy sky. Her body gave a shudder, and then relaxed against the stone.

Onyx awoke with a start in her locked arms, instinctively baring his fangs. "Aria?" he asked in confusion with a sleep-laden voice. Lily took a deep breath, feeling the potion heal her fresh cuts and bruises heal over. "What happened?" he said.

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Unsure how she wanted to answer the cobra's question, she peered over the edge of her rock ledge at the crushed car. She groaned when it was engulfed by a ball of flame. "We're going to have to walk for while," she said ruefully.

She pulled her wand from her pocket, thankful that it and her shrunken supplies had not been damaged in the roll down the mountain, and recast the heating spell over Onyx before wrapping him around her neck so she could use her hands to climb down the mountain.

She deftly found the crevices along the rock face as she moved down. Her Rosake speed aided her in going quickly, though she didn't dare try it too quickly with Onyx so precariously placed around her neck. Halfway down she felt her power flicker. She paused, surprised. The Drought should last her for another two months according to her memory. She hadn't used up that much of her reserve, had she?

Her question was answered once she reached the bottom of the mountain and tried to run at her super-speed. Her footfalls seemed too heavy to be her own and she let out a frustrated shout. Of all the places to lose her extra power! Stuck in the middle of a wintry Colorado with no one around other than an injured reptile around her neck who was relying on her to be able to survive in the cold. "This is going to take forever," moaned Onyx when he comprehended what was going on.

Trying to lighten the mood and get the snake's mind off the long trek ahead, Lily said, "What do you say? Maybe we can get a Hummer next. It'd be able to fall off a mountain and live."

Onyx gave a little hiss of amusement. "I wish there was a car as durable as you. Then we'd be able to get around the world in no time" Onyx said. "We could call it the Aria 3000."

"Good idea," Lily said as she started to climb up the next mountain. "I'll get right on that. But for now, we'll have to take things slow."

"I hate the cold," Onyx grumbled, tightening his grip around her neck. "It makes me feel tired and hungry."

"Actually," Lily commented as she pulled herself up onto a small ledge, "That's probably just all the medicine Doctor Hans put in you."

"Well," Onyx said, "then I guess I hate medicine."

Lily rolled her eyes readjusted her grip on one rock. "You just want to find something to hate," she decided. "Why not just hate the entire US for having medicine and cold weather?"

"Good idea," Onyx said. "Let's get out of here and find some place with a lot of sun."

"What do you say to the Caribbean?" she asked, smiling slightly. The smile fell when the rock she was resting her left foot on suddenly became dislodged from the mountain's face and she gasped, holding on with only her hands. Her feet scrambled, trying to find a flat surface to set on. She forced herself to take a deep breath and let her feet hang loose for a second.

Slowly, she pulled herself up using her grip on two overhead rocks, then found a small ledge to rest her foot on. She sighed and pressed herself against the rock face, breathing deeply through her nose. "Are you all right?" Onyx asked tentatively, squeezing to an almost uncomfortable extreme around her neck.

"I'm fine," Lily said. "Listen, it'll just take a few moments to get up to that little path up there. See it? We can climb up there and have lunch. Then we'll both feel better."

Edgar, making his steady way up the mountain road in a small rental car, found his eye captured by a plume of thick smoke. Surprised to find anything burning in the snow-covered mountain range, the Auror pulled over, climbed from the comfort of his car and walked to the edge of the road. The protective guard railing was twisted sideways, indicating that whatever had broken it had been moving quite a bit over the speed limit.

He Apparated back up to his car and climbed in. If she was back on foot then he'd have no way of catching her with her new speed. The chase would have to wait until he got to another fireplace connected to the Floo network.

He slammed on his brakes and jumped out of the car, pulling out his wand. Focusing on the girl as accurately as he could so far away, he thought, Immobulus! and jabbed his wand in her direction. The only result was a nearby wren freezing on its perch. Edgar took aim again, watching the elusive Stunner sitting so calmly so close. "Immobulus!" he shouted, frustrated.

Unfortunately, she chose that moment to lay back, leaving the spell to collide with the rock wall behind her. She was immediately gathering her things, keeping low and looking around for the source of the attack, wand already clutched in her hand.

Edgar Apparated to the other mountain and looked down at the girl. Lily pushed herself to her feet and pointed her wand at him, but he Stunned her before she could speak.

Edgar sighed, glad that the danger was over so quickly. In the next moment, however, the hair on the back of his neck raised on end when he heard a hiss coming from under the prone Stunner. He was taking a hesitant step forward when a streak of black shot from under her and a pair of glistening fangs pierced his ankle.

You all are getting this story for free. I'm spending time when I should be studying for the AP tests to type and post this. The least you could do in payment is drop a short review. Now, if any of you care what happens to Edgar, then you'll review. Thank you.

Lily's emerald eyes fluttered open to reveal a chillingly familiar room. Shacklebolt stood at the end of her bed, pocketing his wand. "Hello, Miss Evans," he thundered.

"Where's Bones?" she asked, surprised that he wasn't there to gloat himself.

Shacklebolt looked grave. "Getting the anti-venom. We're lucky he didn't die. That was a spiteful thing to do," he continued, "setting that trap."

Lily paused to mull over his words. Then her blood turned cold. "Where's the snake now?" she asked in an off-hand voice.

"We donated it to the London Zoo." Lily's stomach plummeted, but she fought to keep a blank face. "You're only in here for today," Shacklebolt informed her, "You'll be returning to Hogwarts in the morning because Edgar wanted to talk to you. Actually," said the Auror, checking his watch, "he should be in soon. Now, I need to get back to work. Try not to cause any more damage." Shacklebolt left the cell with his eyes on his watch, muttering to himself.

"What," asked the Mark quietly, "happened to our brother?"

Lily quickly reined in her grief. "They sent him to a place where they keep animals safe," she whispered.

The tattoo gave an angry hiss. "They should not take away your familiar," it spat. "Once a wizard—witch—finds her familiar, it should never leave."

"You think Onyx was my familiar?" asked Lily quietly, closing her eyes and trying to breathe deeply.

The door opened quietly to reveal Bones. "Yes," answered her tattoo softly. Lily furiously avoided Bones's gaze.

"Why did you run?" he asked immediately, limping forward.

"You know why," Lily spat, rolling onto her back on the bed to glare at the ceiling.

"I do," Bones murmured, conjuring a chair to sit beside her bed. "And it's not the excuse you've been telling yourself."

Worried where the conversation was headed, Lily stubbornly said, "I'm tired of you and Him telling me what to do." She kept her eyes glued to the ceiling. "Who wouldn't want to live a long, luxurious life?"

"That's just what you want everyone to think," Bones said wisely. "Do you want to know the real reason?"

"That was the real reason," Lily whispered. There was a twisting in her gut, as though her body was objecting to her lie. "I wanted escape. That's it."

"No," Bones said. "I don't think it is. You feel guilty. You feel so guilty that you can hardly live with yourself."

"No," Lily argued softly. "I don't. I don't care."

"You kept thinking of all those people you helped kill and you ran," Bones continued in a louder voice.

"No," Lily whispered, eyes locked away from him.

"Look at me and tell me you don't feel bad," Bones challenged. Lily rolled sideways and sat up on the edge of the bed fluidly so she was directly in front of the Auror. She met Bones's hazel eyes, but found that she couldn't speak. "You can't even think about those people you Stunned, the people you let die," Edgar said quietly. Each word hit Lily like a knife. "You feel guilty because you hated Jessica Fairfield and now she's dead. Killed by your 'father'."

It was though there was a tiger inside of her, tearing at her from the inside out. "No..." she croaked.

You feel guilty because you think you've been just as creul and heartless as Lord Voldemort." Your fault, your fault, your fault! cried

her mind. "You... you're drowning in the tears of everyone left behind. You tried to run away from yourself," Bones finished in a whisper, but to Lily he was shouting.

She didn't want to hear this. She couldn't hear this. Suddenly she became aware of tears burning their path down her face. "N-no, I didn't," she said brokenly. "I d-don't care at a-all."

"No emotion is more deadly than one that's suppressed," Bones told her. "You just need to accept it."

"I d-didn't want to do any of it," Lily choked out. "I couldn't like Petunia die. She's all the family I have left." At least, that's what she told herself. Maybe that was just her excuse. Maybe she was as bad as Him. "I never liked it like He did," she told herself. "I hated it. Can't anyone get that?" she shrieked.

"Then why do you blame yourself?" asked Bones calmly.

"I should have found a way. I'm the powerful Stunner, right?" Lily shudder. "I should h-have found a wa-way to get P-Petunia away then let H-Him kill me."

"It's not your fault," Bones told her. His face was as solemn as his words. "You shouldn't blame yourself."

"You just said I sh-should!" Lily exclaimed through sobs. ALL YOUR FAULT! screamed her mind.

Bones shook his head. "I said you did, not that you should. You said that Voldemort took you when you were eleven, then was able to break through your Occlumency until last year. Any plans you had would have been quashed immediately."

"That's n-not important," Lily argued. "I was th-the one that killed your courisn, remember? Do you not blame me?" she finished bitterly.

"Lily," he said calmly. "How many times have you performed an Unforgivable on an innocent person?"

Lily paused. “Seven.”

“And they were...” Bones prompted.

“Five Imperius and two Cruciatus curses,” she admitted, remembering the screams with a flinch.

Bones adopted a confused look. "Well then, how did you kill Deborah?" he asked her.

“Shut up!” Lily exclaimed. “Just because I didn’t kill her doesn’t mean it wasn’t my fault!”

“Why have you never cast a Killing Curse?” asked Bones suddenly. “Surely You-Know-Who (1) tried to make you cast it.”

"I couldn't do it," she muttered. ALL YOUR FAULT!

“Do you know why?” Bones was still speaking calmly.

"Because I'm weak," Lily snarled.

“Because you can’t perform a Killing Curse unless you really want to,” Bones told her. “You never wanted to kill anything and I know it. So do you. Stop blaming yourself,” he ordered softly. “Think it over,” he said, standing up.

Lily closed her eyes as he left the room, and then laid back on the bed. Could he be right? Did it even matter whose fault it was if she had still committed the crimes?

[illegible]

“Where are you?” Alastor growled through the fire. “You need to get started searching.”

Edgar gave a humorless smile. "One floor below Lily Evans."

Alastor jumped, hitting his disembodied head on the top of the hearth. “You found her? And caught her?” he exclaimed, surprised. Edgar nodded, averting his eyes. “Don’t say,” Alastor growled. “Whatever misgivings you have, I don’t want to hear—”

“We shouldn’t have taken her back,” he cut in, sighing. “She feels just as guilty as I thought. I know you wanted her to join our side, but she’s in a very precarious mental state. Who are we to say she has to face her problems? I could barely finish questioning her she was so distraught. I don’t feel right about this. I know we need her knowledge, but sending her back to school would be dangerous. She needs help,” Edgar burst.

Alastor rolled his eyes. “Deal with it,” he said shortly. “I want her back in school, and for her to stay there other than giving us more information on Death Eater movements. And you,” he continued, narrowing his eyes, “need to find a permanent replacement Defense teacher. I want your butt back on the field. Do it,” he instructed before terminating the connection.

Edgar sighed, leaning back in his chair. How much sleep was he going to lose over this?

[illegible]

“Lily?” asked the Mark of Salazar tentively. Lily had been staring at it blankly, eating the snake’s silver and green diamonds and its black and red swirls wind their way lethargically around her hand.

“Mm?” she acknowledged softly.

“What are you thinking?” The snake tattoo met her eyes. “You are quiet.”

“Even if it wasn’t really my fault they all died,” Lily whispered, voice going automatically to its comfort zone, “there is still all of Europe, and the world, that blame me. Everyone... except Bones, that is,” she muttered bitterly. “He just has to care, doesn’t he? I’d have been fine, perfect, in the States.”

“You were going insane,” the Mark told her, watching her intently.

“I wasn’t already?” she grumbled, not really taking offense. “Besides, I couldn’t hurt anyone else in America,” she said, more to herself than the tattoo.

“You couldn’t help anyone either. I already told you that Master Slytherin needs you to stop his newest heir,” the Mark hissed. “You couldn’t fulfill your duty in America, feeling sorry for yourself.”

Lily’s face froze. “I was not feeling sorry for myself,” she said, words clipped.

“Yes you were,” argued the Mark as though not noticing, or caring, that Lily looked ready to burn her own hand off just to hurt the tattoo at that moment. “You’ve been selfish about your own problems and didn’t care about people who need you.”

“Quiet!” Lily ordered. “I wasn’t! All I do here is Stun, Stun, Stun! I was protecting everyone else!”

“And that’s why you robbed a bank? To help other people?” the Mark hissed.

“I didn’t—That’s not—I didn’t want to die,” she muttered, “I don’t want to die,” she corrected herself. “And I wasn’t really thinking,” she admitted. Suddenly defensive, Lily said, “If you didn’t think I was going the right thing, why did you let me go?”

The tattoo gave a sibilant laugh. “You would not have listened,” it reminded her. “I was waiting for an opportune time.”

Lily shook her head. “So Slytherin,” she said sourly.

“Thank you. Besides, I knew Bones would find you soon enough. After all, there was that Tracking Charm.”

Lily gritted her teeth and whispered slowly, “What Tracking Charm?”

“Sorry to disturb you, professor,” Edgar said as Dumbledore approached the fire. Edgar shuffled on his knees to find a better position on the hard floor hundred of miles away from his head.

“No thank you, sir. I’m here about Lily,” Edgar informed him.

“First I wanted to say that... she needs more than... I mean, she’s nearly insane with all her guilt and emotions. I think we should send her to St. Mungo’s for intense therapy,” he said.

Edgar struggled for words. “This is a bit more... Compared with her sanity... In her state of... I think it would be more beneficial for her to get help.”

“We can’t keep her safe in St. Mungo’s,” Dumbledore said. “She needs to return to school. But I will look into options here. Is there anything else I can help you with?”

Edgar paused, organizing his thoughts. “Remember how you said that we need to know her thoughts to get her on our side?” he asked. At Dumbledore’s nod, he continued, “Well, she’s been talking a lot to her tattoo and I’d like to know what she’s saying. Do you have a way to translate Parseltongue?”

Dumbledore didn't falter. "I'll need the memories you want to know. Come on through," he said, waving his wand to briefly take down some of the Floo wards.

Edgar rolled the rest of the way into Dumbledore's office, his sleeping legs protesting at the sudden motion. The office was as majestic as Edgar remembered, full of rich colors and odd magical gizmos. The tall Headmaster led him to a stone basin in the corner of the room unoccupied by Fawkes. "A Pensieve," Edgar murmured, awed. One of the rarest artifacts in the world, just sitting in Dumbledore's office. He inspected the rune-engraved side, fascinated.

“Place your wand to your temple, think ‘Penasivia’, then pull the wand away slowly, thinking of the memory,” Dumbledore instructed.

Edgar did so carefully, focusing on what he saw of Lily that morning. When his wand tip was away from his head, he felt strangely disoriented, as though his very mind had become fuzzy and altered. How many memories had he taken out? Which memory had he taken out? It had something to do with the Stunner...

“You will feel slightly disoriented for a minute or two,” Dumbledore said, taking the wand from Edgar limp hand and lowering the shimmering strand into a small unmarked vial attached to the edge of the basin. As he pocketed the memory, he continued, “I’ll get a copy of the translation to you as soon as I can.”

“The results are confidential,” Edgar reminded him dazedly, stepping back towards the fireplace.

“Of course,” Dumbledore said, patting his back as he helped him back into the emerald flames. “I’ll see you both tomorrow morning,” said Dumbledore, voice following Edgar as he spun back to headquarters.

Edgar moved to his bed and sat on the edge, clasping his head in his hands. Now he just had to wait until it was time to talk to Lily again. He stood suddenly, though his aching head protested. He might as well wait in the Observation Room if anywhere.

[illegible]

Despite the grilled cheese sandwich slid under the door a few hours ago for lunch, Lily's stomach was growling discontentedly.

Back to Hogwarts tomorrow... Lily growled softly under her breath. Bellatrix Black would no doubt corner her the moment she saw her. Lily could feign ignorance or blow her rival into a million pieces. As appealing as annihilating Bellatrix was, Lily still didn't want to return to the mundane school life and those dark nights where the dead haunted her dreams.

Her stomach growled again, the dull pain calling her attention. Suddenly, she sat up straight on the bed. "Where are you going?" asked the Mark sharply as she swung her legs over the edge of the bed. Lily didn't answer, slinking off the bed and standing quietly beside the door. "What do you think you're doing?" the Mark hissed. "Give up, they've got you."

"You've got me, you mean," Lily whispered to it icily.

The Mark twitched its tail angrily. "Your destiny is unavoidable. Your job is to stop the heir."

The doorknob twisted quickly and Lily held her breath. Before she could make her move, however, she found herself immobilized. Bones peered cautiously around the door, then raised an eyebrow. "Lily? What are you doing back there?" he asked in a tone a little too innocent and cheerful for her liking.

He levitated Lily back to her bed, retrieved the two plates of food from outside the door and closed it. When he removed the spell from the girl, she narrowed her eyes at him. "How did you know where I was?" she hissed.

"Lucky guess," he said breezily. "More importantly, why were you behind the door?"

"Are you completely daft?" Lily snarled.

“Actually, you’d be surprised how many people have asked me that,” Bones said pleasantly. “Well, I’m guessing you were trying to run back to the land of the free, right?”

“If I tell you where I’m going, will you still follow me?” Lilt retorted.

“You’re not going anywhere,” the Mark told her. “We will not put up with any more escape acts.”

“What did it say?” Bones asked casually, inspecting the tattoo curiously.

“Nothing of consequence,” Lily said coolly, turning her head from the two beings who played the Fates in her life.

Bones handed her the plate of a ham sandwich and chips, conjuring a chair to sit next to her. “You’re going back to school tomorrow,” he told her. “And you won’t be leaving until graduation.”

“I suppose that makes you happy,” Lily muttered, She was being too careless with her words, she know, but, damn it, she was infuriated!

“Actually,” Bones said, taking a bite of his sandwich, “I suggested that we put you in St. Mungo’s for a while.”

Lily had to force herself not to lash out at him. “I doubt that would solve anything.”

“Well, Dumbledore agreed with you on that, so you’re going to Hogwarts instead, despite what you want,” Bones said, stuffing a chip in his mouth. Lily tore off the crust off the sandwich and ate it slowly. “Dumbledore told me about the engagement,” he said suddenly.

Lily paused and slowly swallowed the bread. Maybe he was bluffing. “Pardon?” Her voice came out icy.

“You and the Lestrangle kid,” he continued. “The daft one.”

Lily's features froze into her cold mask. "Unfortunately, you're correct," Lily murmured. "Why do you mention it?" she asked. If you act like you don't care, he won't dig deeper, she told herself.

"Just wondering when you started dating, that's all," Bones said calmly.

Lily's jaw tightened. "Stop acting like an idiot, Bones. We both know you're not," she said sharply.

"I was just trying to remind you of all the reasons you never want to go back to that side," Bones said, hazel eyes losing some of their sparkle.

"I don't see how I can help anymore on your side either," Lily retorted. "You make me go to school with Death Eaters and go to His meetings, don't give me any freedom, then expect me to respect you enough to stick around! Open your eyes. No one in their right mind would trust a pack of conscience-challenged hypocrites!" She took a deep breath and schooled her features. "Just go away."

Edgar paused, looking guiltily aside. Then he looked back at her. "We have been a bit hypocritical," he admitted, "but we were just trying to help you."

"If you think that anything you've done has helped me, then maybe you really are an idiot," she whispered, eyes locked straight forward past his head.

She didn't move when he shot to his feet and left the room, slamming the door behind him. Appetite gone, she set the plate on the floor beside her bed and sat still on the edge. Carefully, she closed her eyes, trying to reign in her emotions. Her eyes snapped back open again, however, when Bones burst back through the door.

"If you help us, we can prevent headlines like these," Bones said, slamming a stack of newspapers of varying age onto the bed. "Two dead, Muggles killed, tortures, dozens dead, attack on Hogsmeade, Dark Mark appears again... We get rid of Voldemort, we put an end

to all this," he said, gesturing to the articles. "We just have to finish this, then you'll be free the rest of your life."

"If I have a life after this," Lily muttered, looking over the articles. "I thought you said it wasn't my fault?"

"It's not your fault," he reiterated. "But it is your problem. It's everybody's problem." He turned and took a step towards the door. "Those are what changed my mind about bringing you back here. I was about to let you go. Then I saw what it would do."

[illegible]

(1) He says the fake name to calm her down. She's already on the verge of complete hysteria.

Tendrils of pink light spread over the sky like a huge net ensnaring the girl watching. Lily stared out at the barely lit landscape rushing past the Knight Bus. The reflection she looked past at the sky was not her own, rather a blonde Bones had concocted to hide her identity.

Next to her, the aforementioned Auror checked his watch calmly. "We should arrive in time for you to put your things in your room and eat before your first class. Which, ironically, is mine."

Lily considered asking how much longer he would be teaching Defense, but decided to ignore him instead, for the answer was unlikely to lift her mood. She stared blankly at the sunrise, a frown trying to overtake as she recalled how no matter how valid her excuses that morning had been, Bones had remained adamant that she return to the school.

He apparently believed that, because the raid on Nightshade Mansion had failed and that none of the Order had been captured, she was safe from the Dark Lord's wrath. Lily wasn't quite as optimistic.

The moment Lily set foot off the bus she considered leaping back on, but an invisible tug from Bones reminded her that his spell stopped her from moving more than five feet away from him.

Unconsciously Lily fidgeted the replaced rose gold bracelet on her right wrist. Noticing her movement, Bones commented, "Those things cost several hundred Galleons a piece." A frown pulled at his features. "What did happen to the first? They're not exactly easy to get off."

"You find all sorts of helpful people in Knockturn Alley," Lily muttered, casting a furious glance at the looming castle ahead.

"Doubtless," Bones conceded, straightening his robes. "Here comes our ride," he said, gesturing to the approaching thestral-led carriage that glided towards them.

Lily met the blank eyes of one skeletal horse as it moved towards her. The young thestral took a curious step towards her, bony muzzle outstretched. Lily was still as it approached, then turned her face and

stepped back before it reached her. The creature gave a nervous snort at the sudden movement and clacked its sharp hooves against the stone street restlessly.

“C’mon Lily,” Bones said, stepping into the carriage. Lily followed grudgingly, but her head was high and defiant.

[illegible]

“Hey James, did you study for that Potions test? I can’t remember what comes after adding the lacewing flies,” Remus asked James over breakfast, lazily taking a drink of pumpkin juice.

He turned to answer him, swallowing a bite of bacon. “Yeah, you have to...” he trailed off, staring at the entrance of the Great Hall, a piece of bacon dropping from his hand.

"Uh, James?" asked Remus with a small laugh. "You okay?"

“Lily,” he breathed, eyes fixed forward. Remus whipped his head around and saw Lily quietly taking a seat at the end of the table.

When Remus turned back, he found James half out of his seat, eyes locked on the girl. Quickly Remus jerked on his robe, pulled him back to the bench and hissed, “Stop it!”

James glared at him and tried to pull back up. “Sirius!” Remus said, drawing the Animagus’s attention from a Quidditch-related conversation with a sixth year.

“Huh?” Sirius asked, “Sup with Prongs?”

"Lily's back," he explained, trying to keep James sitting down.

Sirius blinked. "Let him go," he said as though it were obvious.

“If James is the first one to greet her then everyone will notice!” Remus explained quietly. “Let someone else go first. James!” he said, so sharply that it caught his attention. He seemed surprised to find

that Remus was the one stopping him from moving. “Are you trying to get her in trouble?”

“I...” James said weakly, and then he shook his head sharply to clear it and stopped fighting Remus. “Fine,” he snapped, eyes back on the Stunner. “But I’m not letting out of my sight again.”

[illegible]

The news of Lily's return washed over the Great Hall at the rapid speed of all gossip. However, not being a part of the student grapevine, did not find out until halfway through the meal.

“Someone needs to let Him know,” muttered Rudolphus across the table to Severus.

Reluctantly moving his eyes from his Potions text, Severus frowned slightly. “Did someone slip a Gibbering Concoction into your drink, Lestrangle?”

“You don’t think anyone should tell him?” Rudolphus asked incredulously, leaning closer to him across the table.

Severus paused, not enjoying his feeling of confusion. “Tell him what?”

“About Evans!” Rudolphus growled loudly.

Severus rolled his eyes. “She’s been gone for over two weeks. Surely you remember that little reminder He gave on Saturday.”

“You haven’t noticed yet, have you?” gloated Rudolphus. “Man, you’re really out of the loop.”

As his words sank in, Severus whipped around to scan the Gryffindor table. The rarely surprised Severus's mouth hung open in shock when his eyes latched onto the shimmer of distinctive red hair.

He whirled back around. “When did she get in?” he asked, trying to retain his emotions.

“About half an hour ago,” Rudolphus admitted, looking put out that Severus had caught on so quickly. “So are you going to write Him?”

Dazedly Severus nodded and retrieved his quill and ink from his bag. He sat for a moment, staring at the night black ink sitting still in its well, so tranquil in comparison to the speed his thoughts were racing at.

“Snape,” Rudolphus said bluntly, knocking him out of his reverie, “you might need some parchment.”

Severus quickly wrote a vague, encrypted letter stating that Lily was back, shoved it in his bag with a charm on it. When he snuck a glance backwards, he saw that Lily had departed. “I have to get to class,” he said to Rudolphus, who gave an offhanded wave and returned to his conversation with Crabbe.

Severus left the Great Hall quickly, black eyes darting back and forth over the heads of the bustling students, searching for that tell-tale flash of red.

There! Severus slinked to where Lily was walking steadily towards her first class, hands clasped to her book bag. As he approached her, however, Potter and his cronies came from her other side and began talking hurriedly to her in low voices.

Severus paused, watching her leave with them. Then he turned and walked away.

[illegible]

“Good morning, class!” Bones said, striding into the classroom. Lily forced her face to remain motionless at this jovial greeting. Next to her, Potter, who hadn’t left her side since he had caught up with her, looked sideways to catch her reaction. “Sorry I was ot the past few days,” Bones continued. “Been a bit busy.”

“Dumbledore filled in,” Potter whispered to her. “That was interesting.”

“I can imagine,” she muttered back.

“Today we’re going over Lethifolds,” Bones continued. “Since, not only are they dangerous but also since this cold weather would kill them, we don’t have a specimen to study. This lesson’ll be all by the book. Please open to page 713 in your text and take out a quill and parchment.”

“Hey, uh, Lily,” Potter said as he pulled out the supplies. “I like your haircut.”

Lily resisted reaching up to feel it. “Thanks,” she murmured.

“The only known repellant of Lethifolds is the Patronus Charm,” Bones lectured, “which we will be practicing later today. There have been few cases when a victim actually managed to escape alive, but...”

As Bones continued, Potter passes a note to Lily. ‘So...’ it read.

‘So what?’ she wrote back quickly, sliding it back.

‘Are you going to tell us where you were?’ his scrawl asked when he returned it.

Lily glanced at the paper, then back up at Bones without responding to him. “...and some people believed that they are directly related to Dementors, but that has been proved false. The misconception arose from the idea that Dementor robes are part of their actual being,” Bones was saying when Lily began listening, “but...”

Potter nudged her arm and slipped her a different shred of parchment. ‘Sorry,’ it read, ‘I won’t ask again.’

Lily nodded to him, accepting the implied truce. “See?” the Mark hissed. “You do not hate it here. You are safe.”

The girl brought the tattoo to her face so she could whisper, "That's because I haven't talked to any Slytherins yet. But I have Double Charms with them next period."

"...cover it up by framing a car crash or make it out as murder," Bones was saying, "Luckily, however, Lethifold attacks are rare due to the containment of all the captured ones. Once in captivity, Lethifolds are fed..."

Black, on Lily's other side, grabbed her left hand suddenly. "Your nails are gorgeous!"

Lily snatched her hand back, then paused. She slowly put her hand back next to Black. "I had to get them redone a week or so ago," she told him softly.

"That color's perfect. Not too blue, not too green. It's like turquoise or aqua or something," Black continued, inspecting the paint closely.

"That's...nice," Lily replied uncertainly.

"Please find a partner to work on the Patronus with," Bones called out.

"I call Lily!" said Black loudly, latching to her arm.

Disheartened, Potter muttered, "I wanted to be Lily's partner."

"C'mon Lily!" Black exclaimed. Lily allowed him to pull her from her seat and to an open area in the front of the room with the other clustering groups.

Lily watched Potter team up with Remus, leaving Pettigrew to partner with an annoyed looking Ravenclaw.

"Make sure you focus completely on your happy memory and enunciate clearly," Bones instructed as he levitated the desks to the back of the classroom.

"Do you want to try first?" Black offered, brushing an ebony lock from his face.

“You go first,” she said, spinning her wand in her hand lazily.

“All right. Expecto Patronum!” he exclaimed, flourishing his wand dramatically. A pathetic puff of silver mist emitted from his wand, dissipating almost immediately.

Lily resisted the urge to laugh and advised, “Try not moving your wand as much. And it’s Patronum, not Patroninium.”

Black rolled his shoulders back and grinned. “I was just kidding that time,” he drawled jokingly. “Keeping you on your toes.” He winked and pointed his wand forward again. “Expecto Patronum!” The resulting mist was thinner than last time, giving a defeated sigh as it vanished.

Remus called to Black from across the classroom. “That was weak, mate!”

“That’s karma for taking my partner,” Potter informed him.

Sirius peered into the top of his wand. “Is this thing on?” he asked, giving it a tap. A bouquet of yellow roses burst from the tip straight into his face, making him let out a surprised yelp. Seeing Lily’s look, Black whipped the flowers off the wand and presented them to her with a low bow.

“Nice,” she acknowledged, inspecting them. “But there’s an imprint of your face in here.”

Black snatched them back and banished them quickly. “You try a Patronus,” he said grumpily.

Lily nodded and drew her wand.

“Hey, Miss Evans, are you getting this?” Bones asked, walking towards them.

Lily paused, watching him warily. “I haven’t tried yet,” she said shortly.

He stopped and stood next to Black. Lily took a breath to start the spell.

“Wait!” Bones said, taking a step forward. “Which happy memory are you choosing?”

“None of your business,” she said through gritted teeth.

“Don’t be like that, L—Miss Evans,” he said. “I’m just trying to help.”

“We’ve been over this. I didn’t want your help then and I don’t want it now,” Lily said, frustrated.

“Just go ahead and try the spell,” he said calmly.

Looking around the room and seeing the silver animals frolicking beside their creators, Lily became infuriated. She didn’t want to be here at all!

“Go on,” urged Bones.

“Expecto Patronum!” she spat, jabbing her wand forward. The ensuing mist was so dark a silver that it was nearly black. It writhed and morphed into a slender snake, patterned similarly to the Mark of Salazar.

Bones jerked Black to the floor as the shadowed serpent shot through the air towards the nearest Patronus. The eagle turned to fight, but the snake bit it, leaving it to morph into a puff of darker silver mist that disappeared quickly.

As it moved on to the next Patronus, Lily heard Potter shout the spell and watched a large stag form and gallop at the dark snake. For a moment, Lily thought the snake would strike the stag, but a swift jab of its antlers turned the snake into the normal pale color before it vanished. The stag trotted back to Potter, but dissipated before he could touch it.

“Very good, Miss Evans,” blustered Bones. “Just as I told you to do!” Lily stored her wand and watched Bones make up an excuse for the

shadow Patronus. "That's known as a Dark Patronus," he said. "Instead of thinking of something happy, you think of something bad. Of hatred. These are used in the destruction of other Patronuses, but only work if the thought of the victim Patronus was made of pure joy. A Patronus made from love can easily defeat a Dark one." He glanced at his watch. "All right, class dismissed. Miss Evans, please come over here."

Lily looked at him in the bustle of students leaving the room, then walked over to her desk, snatched up her bag and left the room.

"Hey Lily!" Potter called, catching up to her. "Didn't Bones want to talk to you?"

"I don't really care," she hissed. "Why do you have to keep talking to me?"

Potter shrugged. "I dunno. Anyways, how's you make that Patronus? It was sweet."

Lily took a steadying breath. "Didn't Bones just explain how?"

"Well, I guess, but that was so awesome! I mean, it destroyed my Patronus and stuff, but—"

"Will you be quiet?" Lily asked sharply as they entered the Charms classroom. Bellatrix and several other Slytherins sat in the back of the room, watching her enter as hawks watch rabbits.

Potter, being the rash idiot he was, stepped protectively in front of Lily as though to shield her from their malevolent stares. "Let's sit up front," he murmured, guiding her to a desk. "I don't like them," Potter said as they sat down. "They're creepy."

"I concur," Lily said under her breath.

Black slid into the seat next to Potter and gave a laugh. "Bella looks like she swallowed a Dungbomb," he told them, chuckling.

“Settle down, settle down,” squeaked Flitwick, getting up in front of the class. When it was as close to silent as a classroom can ever be, he continued, “Today we’re going to continue working on the Protean Charm...”

Lily snuck a look at the back of the class to see that Bellatrix’s face had been aptly described. She started to look forward again when Severus caught her eye. He was sitting with the other Slytherins, of course, but he seemed isolated.

The girl felt the urge to say something to him, to let him know that she was okay and that she hoped he was too, but with Bellatrix still glaring at her, Lily had to turn back without a word.

Review!

James started at the parchment, eyes fixed on the dot labeled ‘Lily Evans.’ She was in her dormitory on her bed, not moving. The seeming calm was not enough to convince James to end his vigil.

“You do realize that stalking is illegal, don’t you?” Remus asked when he glanced over James’s shoulder.

"I'm not stalking her!" James exclaimed, not looking up.

“Then what would you call it then?” Remus said, amused.

"I'm making sure nothing attacks her."

“She’s in her dormitory. Unless another Gryffindor girl has it in for her, she’s safe.”

“That if a Slytherin gets into our Common Room? What if Jillian gets put under the Imperius? What if Voldemort flies through her window?!”

“James...” sighed Remus.

“Hey, Prongs is right,” Sirius said, amusement thick in his voice, “He needs to protect her from UFDLs.”

“Huh?” asked James distractedly.

“Unidentified Flying Dark Lords.”

“Ha ha,” James muttered. “Now quiet, I need to watch her.”

“Stalker,” Remus sang quietly.

[illegible]

"It's not possible to Accio a living thing, is it?" Lily asked the Mark as she rested on her bed. Her dorm was empty because the remaining two Js were at a small party being held in the fifth year girls' room.

“As long as you don’t mind that it won’t be alive by the time it arrives,” the Mark told her coolly. “Why?”

“Onyx,” Lily whispered, eyes closed.

“Listen, you—The new heir is trying to reach you through me,” the Mark said suddenly. “He—Velisna?”

Lily took a deep breath. “My Lord?”

“Where are you?” hissed the voice.

“School, in my dorm,” Lily disclosed, hands trembling.

There was a pause. “Who brought you there?”

Lily didn’t know how to respond—she hadn’t gone over her alibi with Dumbledore yet.

“Was it the Order?”

“Yes,” Lily answered softly.

There was a loud, annoyed hiss. “You’re leaving. Right now.”

“I can’t.” Lily said quickly. “I’m being watched.”

“Kill them.”

“There’s too many,” Lily lied hurriedly. “And they took my wand.”

There was a sudden rapping on Lily’s window. Surprised, she opened her curtain and looked over at Potter, who floated outside on his broom. “They’re back,” she hissed to the Dark Lord.

She stood and quietly opened the window. “Where is he”? I’ll kill him, I will,” Potter said, flying through the open window.

“Who?” Lily asked innocently.

“Voldemort!” Potter exclaimed, brandishing a piece of parchment. “He’s in here!”

“What are you babbling about, Potter?” Lily asked, watching the Mark for a sign that the Dark Lord had gone.

Potter whipped the parchment onto Jillian’s desk and pointed to a spot. “Right... there...” he trailed off.

Lily peered at the map, for that was what the parchment seemed to be, and saw Potter pointing at two dots labeled ‘Lily Evans’ and ‘James Potter.’

“He was right there, practically on top of you,” Potter said quickly. “He was...”

Lily looked from side to side to ascertain they were alone. “I need to talk to the Headmaster,” she said quietly.

Potter’s eyes widened. “You mean he was...”

“Yes, yes,” Lily said, heading for the door. Potter grabbed his broomstick and followed. When his foot touched the first stair, however, the staircase turned into a slick slide. Lily quickly jumped up, cast a quick spell, and stuck herself to the ceiling. Potter slid all the way down, managing to get on his broom right before spilling out into the Common Room.

The redhead scuttled across the ceiling to meet Potter above the bottom. “Smooth,” she said.

“Uh, yeah,” he said, flushing.

“Fly back through the window through my dorm,” Lily instructed, “so no one will see you coming out of the girls’ dormitory.”

Potter nodded, face still red, and flew back up. Lily waited for the stairs to regain their shape before dropping down stealthily.

There was a commotion as Potter ran down the boys' steps and ran into the Common Room. "Lily?" he panted.

The girl emerged from the stairwell and met him at the edge of the Common Room, glad the room was empty. "Let's go," she muttered.

"So..." Potter said as they left the Common Room.

"Curfew starts in ten minutes!" called the Fat Lady behind them.

"Of course, ma'am," Potter said smoothly, winking at the portrait. The painted lady smiled back, charmed. Once they were a bit away from the guardian, Potter asked, "Now, Lily, what happened? Where'd he go? How'd he get in?"

"How did you know he was there? What kind of map was that?" Lily fired back, suspicious.

"The Marauders' Map," Potter proclaimed. "Able to detect and name every person on the Hogwarts campus."

"And you were watching me... why?"

Potter blushed again. "I... well, you see, I was... I mean, you.... Iwasworriedaboutyou."

Lily looked sideways at him as they walked down a staircase. "Stalker."

Potter burst, "I am not! Why does everyone keep saying that?!"

"Do you have it with you?" Lily asked, ignoring his protest.

Potter pulled a tightly folded parchment from his pocket and handed it to her. "This is blank," Lily told him, handing it back.

"Oh, right. I solemnly swear that I am up to no good," Potter declared. Ink spread over the parchment, forming the features of Hogwarts.

“Could you watch us and make sure He doesn’t come back?” Lily asked.

Potter nodded and fixed his eyes to the parchment. “Look out!” Lily said, pulling him out of the way of a suit of armor.

“Oh, thanks,” Potter said, grinning at her before looking back down.

They walked in near silence towards the Headmaster’s office, James focused on the map while Lily murmured softly to her Mark.

“I thought you were stopping Him from finding me through you,” Lily hissed.

“We were,” the Mark replied coolly.

“Then what—”

“Master Slytherin knows that cutting off your contact from him will make the heir suspicious, making it harder to remain in position,” the Mark hissed. The snake tattoo passed lazily between her fingers, watching her carefully.

“We’re here,” Potter said as they reached the griffin statue. “Do you know the password?”

“Ginger snap?” she guessed. The stone guardian remained impassive. “Licorice Wand?”

“It’s an emergency,” Potter explained.

The gargoyle gave a snort, raising a stone eyebrow. “I don’t like ‘er,” he said huffily.

“Who, Lily?” Potter asked, surprised.

“You can’t still be holding that grudge!” Lily exclaimed incredulously.

“She blew me up,” the gargoyle disclosed, nodding solemnly to Potter.

"I fixed you right afterwards," Lily argued.

"Ye didn't apologize."

"Please sir," Potter interrupted. "I need to talk to Dumbledore. She's just coming along. Surely a handsome statue like yourself can understand that."

The statue puffed up and nodded. "Right you are, son. A'ight, come on in."

"Thank you," Potter said smoothly, leading Lily in.

At the top of the staircase, Potter knocked cautiously on the large door. "Headmaster?" Potter called.

"Come in, Mister Potter, come in," Dumbledore said jovially. "Oh, and Miss Evans," he said when they entered. "Come sit down. Would either of you like a ginger snap?"

"No thanks," Potter said. "Sir, Voldemort was here."

Dumbledore paused. "Here?"

"Inside the castle," Potter continued.

"Inside my Mark," Lily said, exposing her left arm. The tattoo began scurrying around her arm, trying to avoid the wizard's gaze.

"Did he talk to you?" Dumbledore asked sharply.

"Yes," Lily whispered. "I... told him I was brought here by the Order."

"Anything else?" Dumbledore asked in a calmer tone.

"I said you were watching me here and that you took away my wand so I couldn't escape," Lily answered, keeping her emotions contained.

"Nice cover," Dumbledore said approvingly. "Do you think he will try again?"

Lily looked down at her Mark, trying not to scowl. “Will you let Him do it again?”

The tattoo just appraised her silently. “Yes,” Lily answered Dumbledore. “Soon.”

“Can you think of a way to stop him?” Dumbledore asked, meeting her eyes solemnly.

Lily paused. "Do you have a knife?" she asked coolly.

A small frown tugged at the Headmaster's mouth. "That's not funny," he said slowly.

"I apologize," Lily muttered. She could feel Potter's worried eyes on her. "That's all. May we go now?"

“Yes, go on,” Dumbledore said, still watching her face intently. She could feel him trying to break through her Occlumency. “Let me know if it happens again.”

"Of course," Lily said.

[illegible]

“Would you like me to watch the map tonight?” James asked at the foot of her stairs.

Lily shook her head, red hair shimmering in the firelight. "Thank you though," she said quietly.

James nodded and watched her walk up the stairs. "Goodnight," he called up after her. When she didn't reply, James hurried back to his dorm to fill his mates in.

[illegible]

“We should just kill her now!” Bellatrix exclaimed.

“Sh,” Severus warned, looking around the Common Room despite the fact it was empty except their tight-knit circle.

“If she had just come back just a day earlier,” moaned Regulus. There was a collective shudder as they recalled the Dark Lord’s wrath from the previous night.

“Another reason why we should kill her,” Bellatrix stated earnestly.

Severus sighed as realistically as he could. “Unfortunately, we can’t. We have to put up with her if we want to live.”

“Then we at least have to teach her a lesson,” Bellatrix replied heatedly.

“Even if I didn’t know that she could kill us all without breaking a sweat,” Severus objected, “she would report us all to the Dark Lord immediately.”

When Bellatrix did not look convinced, Severus added, “Besides, I hear it was the Order’s fault she left this time.”

Bellatrix scowled. “When I get my hands on them, I’ll—”

“What are you all doing up?” interrupted Slughorn from across the Common Room.

Severus stood up. “Just discussing tomorrow’s Charms test, Professor,” he said smoothly.

Slughorn looked over with slight suspicion. “Turn in soon,” he said before exiting again.

“I’m going to bed,” Severus said to the group. “And I advise you do the same before he gets back.” He turned for the stairs. “Oh, and Bellatrix,” he drawled, “try not to do anything too... rash.”

Lily froze, knife slipping from her fingers onto the scarlet comforter, silent in shock. There was a sibilant chuckle and the snake tattoo twisted to look up at her. “I know you’re there,” the voice said. “This tattoo is connected to your body. It’s awake, you’re awake. Now, what is this about removing our connection?”

"If you weren't muggleborn," the voice said approvingly, "you would most assuredly been in my House."

"I don't want explanations. I want you to fulfill your duty," the tattoo hissed.

“You know full well your duty,” Slytherin said. “Do all you can to stop the radicalist heir.”

“Because he trusts you enough to give you this tattoo,” Slytherin replied. “Stop him or...”

Suddenly the small tattoo revealed glistening white fangs, poised over a large vein in her wrist. “We’ll no longer have a use for you.”

Lily made no sound for nearly a minute. Why not let him do it? Was there really a point to living? Yes. If she really was the only who could defeat Him it was her duty to stop him... right? "Fine," Lily finally said.

The slender tattoo nodded and slithered to the palm of her hand. “I trust I won’t have to contact you again,” Slytherin said offhandedly.

Lily waited for him to say more before realizing he wasn't being rhetorical. "Of course," Lily said softly.

"I hope you won't try to cut me off again," the Mark hissed, back in its normal voice. "I'll never get my tail back, you know."

Lily did not reply, only sighed and leaned over to blow out the candle beside her bed.

[illegible]

“Did you just see what I just saw?” James asked Sirius breathlessly.

"I think so," Sirius said.

“Should we wake up Moony and Wormtail?” James whispered.

“Nah,” Sirius said softly. “I mean, I’m sure a lot of thestrals can breathe fire. It seems like their kind of thing.”

“What?” James asked, blinking.

“Outside the window? Didn’t you see it?”

James rolled his eyes and cleared the Marauders' Map. "Good night Padfoot," he said pointedly.

“Night,” Sirius replied, jumping over to his bed.

James sighed. How did Slytherin get in Lily's dorm? Was it a ghost? Was there another Salazar Slytherin? He leaned over and blew out the candle beside his bed.

[illegible]

"I'm going to the library," Peter said the next morning while they were preparing to go to breakfast.

"You? At the library? This early? Breakfast doesn't even start for a half hour," Remus said, half-joking.

"Yeah, you know, for that... thing," Peter bluffed, worried his plans were obvious to his friends.

"Have fun," Sirius said casually before returning to his conversation with James. "So, I'm thinking that Tuesdays are even worse than Mondays. I mean, today we have Double Charms with Slytherin..."

"What thing?" Remus asked the rat Animagus.

"You know... for Care," he blustered. "Uh, gotta go. I'll meet you in here before breakfast starts. Wait up." Peter scurried from the dormitory before Remus could say anything else.

The Astronomy Tower was deserted when Peter arrived. He hummed nervously and swiveled a telescope on its stand, hoping he could still get down to breakfast in time.

"Hello Peter," said a cool female voice behind him.

The Gryffindor jumped and knocked the telescope from its stand, causing it to crack on the stone floor. "Um, hi, um, Bellatrix," he said, blushing as he hurriedly tried to pick up the telescope and put it back in its place.

"Allow me," said Bellatrix, waving her wand and easily fixing the problem.

"Thanks," Peter said, turning even redder.

The dark girl rolled her shoulders languidly, her litheness reminding Peter starkly of a panther. "So, have you decided yet?"

"I, um, just wanted to—"

“Last night Voldemort entered the school. Mentally, that is,” Dumbledore informed the three Order-affiliated teachers.

“In the school?” McGonagall repeated incredulously. “Surely that’s impossible.”

Edgar did not speak, though his mind was racing. There was only one possibility, of course. The Death Eater Slytherins didn’t have the brains... other than Snape, but he wouldn’t help his classmates endanger the school. But, still, Lily wouldn’t have wanted to her ‘father’ so soon after running from him... or so Edgar assumed.

Dumbledore continued, “He found a way to transport his mind into the Mark of Salazar—onto the Stunner’s arm. No one but Miss Evans and Mister Potter know now, I believe, unless Mister Potter told his friends, which, as you know, is quite likely.”

“Is she okay?” Edgar asked finally.

“She’s perfectly all right, in body that is. She made a rather... violent remark last night, indicating a lack of mental stability,” Dumbledore said solemnly.

“We all know that,” Edgar said dryly.

“Edgar!” McGonagall admonished.

“What? It’s true,” Edgar retorted.

“Is it safe to keep her here?” Murphie asked Dumbledore.

“He cannot harm anyone else in the school,” Dumbledore said soothingly.

“What about Lily?” Edgar asked slowly.

“We... will have to see. If it happens again, we will have to take further action.”

“Speaking of the Mark,” Edgar said, “have you received that translation of her conversations yet?”

Dumbledore nodded and looked at McGonagall and Murphie. “You may head down to breakfast now.”

“Thank you for telling us about this, Albus,” McGonagall said primly.

“We’ll see you at lunch,” Murphie said cheerily.

When they were gone, Dumbledore pulled out a scroll of parchment and handed it to the young Auror. “Did you look through it?” Edgar asked as he looked over the front.

“This is your case,” Dumbledore said. “Let me know if there’s anything important.”

“Of course,” Edgar said off-handedly, already immersed in the translation as he walked out of the large office.

[illegible]

"It seems I've intercepted another letter for you," Bellatrix said icily.

Lily turned calmly to face the girl, setting aside her fork. "Indeed," Lily murmured. "Then I suppose you'd better hand it over."

“Hey, Lily, why didn’t you wait for me in the Common Room?” Potter asked, walking up. “I—oh, hello Bellatrix.” His cheery voice turned cold.

Bellatrix didn't even spare him a glance. "Do you really want to see it?" she asked, holding the scroll in front of Lily tauntingly.

"Give me the letter," Lily said coolly.

“Actually, I don’t think I will,” Bellatrix drawled, pulling the letter back close to herself.

“What’s going on?” Potter asked, looking between the two girls.

“Why don’t I just give it to Potter?” Bellatrix said. “I’m sure he’d find it interesting.”

“What?” Potter asked cautiously.

“Aren’t you curious about where Evans has been the past few weeks?” Bellatrix drawled.

Potter flicked his eyes to Lily and back to the Slytherin. “I don’t care,” he said evenly.

“Not even a little curious? This letter explains everything,” Bellatrix cajoled.

Lily looked between Potter and Bellatrix, keeping her face unconcerned with the conversation. What did the letter say?

Bellatrix flicked open the scroll with one hand and handed it to the messy-haired Marauder. Without even glancing at the exposed print, Potter gave it to Lily, who quickly rolled it back up and stuffed it in her pocket. “Get lost, Bellatrix,” Potter said, voice trembling with anger.

Black, Remus and Pettigrew showed up at that moment, Black angry, Remus surprised and Pettigrew terrified. Bellatrix scowled at Potter then turned to Lily. “We’ll finish this later, Evans,” she promised before slinking away.

“Relax, Petey,” Black said suddenly. “You look ready to wet your pants. We’ll protect you from big bad Bella.”

Pettigrew gave a weak chuckle and looked away.

“What was that about?” Remus asked Lily and Potter.

“Nothing,” Potter said. “Just Bellatrix being Bellatrix. Right Lily?”

“Yeah,” Lily muttered, hand fidgeting with the parchment in her pocket.

There were very few places where Lily would ever feel nervous to be alone. Dark alleys? No. If anything, dark alleys and those who reside in them would fear her. The lair of a vampire coven? They had their weaknesses. Indeed, Lily would much rather fight with bloodsucking beasts than go where she was about to go.

“Ginger snap?”

Lily stood tensely beside a plush chair, watching the Headmaster’s every move with wary eyes but a calm face. “No thank you,” she replied. Would he drop his nice mask now that Potter was not with her?

“Then to what do I owe the pleasure, Miss Evans?” Dumbledore asked, setting the sweets jar aside.

“I received a letter from the Dark Lord. He—”

“Voldemort,” Dumbledore corrected. “I have told you that he is only human.”

“Yes, you have,” Lily acknowledged. “In His letter,” she continued, “He told me he is planning to come rescue me.”

“When?”

“I don’t know when, Head master. Before summer. Sometime when the wards are low,” Lily told him.

“If that is the case then I suggest you remain in the castle on the future Hogsmeade dates, Miss Evans,” Dumbledore said. “And try not to walk outside alone.”

Never allowed outside? Now her imprisonment was complete. If she obeyed, that was. “Of course, Headmaster. That is all I have to report,” Lily said stiffly.

Dumbledore nodded. Lily was about to turn to the door when Dumbledore shocked her by saying, “Your birthday’s next Thursday, correct?”

“Yes sir,” Lily said, masking her surprise.

“Very nice,” Dumbledore said, smiling gently. “I’ve always loved birthdays. You can discard all the regrets of the year but retain all the knowledge.”

Lily wasn’t sure how to respond to that, so she nodded and exited the grand office. Dumbledore acted strange so often it was hard to keep in mind his true nature. Manipulation was key to both Dark and Light leaders—Lily was tired of being a pawn. But her full, and successful, rebellions would have to wait until one side won.

Lily suddenly noticed a group of dark figures at the end of the hallway she was walking down. “Hello Evans,” Bellatrix drawled. “Have a good day?”

“Always,” Lily said coolly. “You?”

“Perfect.”

The two girls stared at each other as Lily approached; Bellatrix’s eyes were alight with a mad glow and Lily’s gaze was carefully calm. “Is there any particular reason that you and your lackeys accosted me?” Lily asked quietly. In fact, the only two Slytherin Death Eaters that were missing were Rabastan Lestrange and Severus. “Something important, I trust.”

“Very,” Bellatrix said. She broke Lily’s gaze to snap at Rudolphus. “Stop breathing so loud!”

The bewildered Slytherin took a step backwards. “Oh, um, sorry.”

“You’d better be,” Bellatrix spat. She turned back forward. “Would you dreadfully mind having a little word with us?” she asked Lily sweetly.

“Will I care what you say?” Lily asked smoothly, though internally she was looking forward to a fight.

“You’d better,” Bellatrix muttered.

“Sorry?” Lily asked as though she hadn’t heard her.

“Oh, nothing,” Bellatrix drawled. “Now, let’s take this conversation somewhere else, shall we? How about that empty Charms classroom?”

“All right,” Lily conceded. She walked beside the Slytherin down a floor with the other Death Eaters flocked behind them. Slughorn passed them as they reached the third floor. “Ah, hello Misses Black and Evans and... the rest of you.”

“Hello professor,” Bellatrix drawled, voice laden with barely concealed contempt. Lily nodded to him.

“I love seeing good inter-House friendships,” he said cheerfully as he strolled away.

Once he was out of sight, they all entered the empty classroom. Lily immediately situated herself so that only the windows were behind her.

“Now listen,” Bellatrix snapped. “We want to know everything.”

“About...”

“About where you were! We had... we had to suffer because of you. He got mad at me because you ran off!” Bellatrix shouted.

“He knows where I was and how I got there. You don’t need to know.”

“Oh, I think we do. Colloportus!” she said, waving her wand at the door before turning the wand on Lily. Following her cue, the others drew their wands. “Ri—”

“Expelliarmus,” Lily said lazily. “Now, the rest of you listen up. Are you sure you want to duel me? I’m going to close my eyes and then any of you still in here in ten seconds will be considered fair game.” She closed her eyes. “One...”

“What possessed you?” James exclaimed that night when Lily finally returned to the Tower. Lily glanced around the full Common Room and looked back at him silently. James took a step closer and whispered harshly, “Why were you in a room with a bunch of Slytherins?”

“Still stalking me?” she asked good-humoredly.

“Yes!” James exclaimed. “I mean, it’s not stalking. It’s protecting.”

“Protecting would be fighting them for me. Stalking is sitting back and watching me fight them,” Lily explained calmly.

“You fought them?!” James exploded. Several students looked p and Lily looked annoyed. “You fought them?” he repeated in a whisper.

“I didn’t hurt them... permanently.” Lily shrugged. “And they started it.”

“That was extremely dangerous,” James reprimanded. “I’m trying to look after you!”

“How? By reporting my every move to the Headmaster?” she asked coolly, good mood of earlier vanished.

“No,” James said defensively. “But making sure no Slytherins attack you!”

“Well, that worked out well,” Lily said sarcastically. “Maybe I should start paying you.”

“Ha ha,” James said dryly. “Either way, it’s not happening again.”

“What, you not having a comeback? I’m not sure whether you can stop that,” Lily said.

“I meant you getting attacked!” James hissed.

“That won’t happen again with or without your help,” Lily told him. “They won’t try me again.”

“Oh really?” James challenged. Lily shushed him and looked around the Common Room entrance. Above the small first-years, McGonagall’s tall emerald hat could be distinguished.

“I’m going to my dorm,” Lily told him quickly, standing up.

Before she could move, James asked the question that had been on his tongue all day. “Was that really Salazar Slytherin?” he asked.

Lily sighed and leaned in. “I’ll tell you later. Don’t tell anyone else. Anyone else.” Then she was gone.

“Excuse me, Mister Potter,” McGonagall said, approaching him. “Where did Miss Evans go?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” James exclaimed. Then, comprehending the question, he said, “Uh, I mean, she went to her dorm.”

“Thank you,” McGonagall said, though looking bewildered by his reaction. “Have a good night.”

James sunk back in the couch by the fire. What had Lily meant by she wasn’t worried about another attack? Had she hurt them that badly?

“Prongsie!” Sirius greeted, hopping onto the couch. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing,” James said hurriedly. When Sirius gave him a curious look, he amended, “I mean, nothing. What’s up with oyu?”

“I got a date with this hot sixth year to sneak to the kitchens sometime. Wasn’t that hard, really,” he scoffed.

“The poor girl looked ready to faint because he looked at her,” Tonks said, sitting down between them. “It was pitiful. Do you expect I would act like that if someone asked me out?”

“No one’s going to ask you out,” Sirius said threateningly. “You’re my cousin. No lecherous little boys are going to date you.”

Tonks rolled her eyes. “They’re not all lecherous. Right James?”

“Right,” James said distractedly. The fire was flickering and moving rather like he imagined Lily’s hair would look underwater.

“Name one un-lecherous boy,” Sirius challenged.

“Uh, Remus,” he said automatically.

“What about me?” the lycan asked as he and Peter sat down in the adjacent arm chairs.

“All right,” Sirius conceded. “You can date Remus. But I approve of no one else.”

“Remus is old,” Tonks complained.

Remus, looking completely lost in the conversation, said, “I am not old. You’re just young.”

“Nuh uh,” Tonks retorted.

“Yuh huh,” Remus said back.

“Nuh uh!”

“I am not doing this with you!” Remus exclaimed, laughing.

“You’re right,” Sirius said, grinning. “He is too old for you. Or you’re too young for him or... whatever.”

“I wonder how old Lily is,” James said distractedly. “Ow!” he exclaimed when Sirius smacked him over the head.

“Snap out of it!” he said. “It’s pitiful!”

“Hey, that’s my word,” Tonks argued.

As normal when running, Lily felt like nothing could catch her, though her logical human said told her how illogical that dream was. The moon climbed high in the dark sky as Lily circled the cast grounds.

Her wolf instincts longed for the forest, but she knew if she hit the border her restraining bracelet would be set off.

So she kept in view of the school, on the edge of the Forbidden Forest, listening to the peaceful nightlife and her own pounding blood.

Finally, feeling refreshed and alive, she completed her last lap, then padded over to the edge of the forest where she had hidden her broom.

The front door to the castle swung open, revealing Professors Murphie and McGonagall. Lily took a step sideways so she was hidden by the forest's shadow. Dumbledore had told her not to go outside alone. Did the teachers know that?

"Do you think she's still on the grounds?" Murphie asked as the two teachers walked down the stone stairs. Lily watched them sharply. Was Murphie in the Order too?

"She had to be unless she got that bracelet off," McGonagall assured her.

How many other teachers were secretly against her? Maybe there were too many of them for her to fight.

Murphie lit her wand and peered into the forest, though her light beam was far from the wolf. "If she can't leave, why are we worrying? She'll be back by morning, I'm sure."

"It's already midnight," McGonagall said. "What if she's been attacked? She's not to be found in the castle. Maybe Death Eaters, or some Forbidden Forest creature—"

Lily, tactic decided, morphed back into her human form and stepped out of the shadows at a light jog. "Hello professors," she greeted calmly.

"Miss Evans!" McGonagall said, relieved. Then her eyes narrowed. "Where have you been?"

“Running,” she said casually. “Sprinting,” she amended at their expressions. “Exercising.”

Murphie tried to look through the woods past her. “Alone?”

“Of course. No one else can keep up with me—other than Professor Bones, I assume you know,” Lily said dispassionately.

Murphie looked flustered. “We just meant that the forest is dangerous, especially at night.”

McGonagall nodded. “You’d better come in.”

“Of course,” Lily said, moving forward.

“She’s not inside,” panted Bones, appearing in the doorway. “I can’t—Oh, you found her.”

“She was exercising,” McGonagall said with a tight lipped smile. “Running.”

“She has mentioned she enjoys it,” Bones said thoughtfully.

“Running?” McGonagall asked, surprised.

“Yes,” Lily answered for him. But now I’m done and I’m tired, so I’d better be getting ot bed.”

“Right,” Murphie said. “We’ll just let you...”

“I’ll escort her up,” Bones offered. “Thanks for your help.”

Murphie suppressed a yawn as she shuffled back into the castle. “N-no problem.”

“Good night, Edgar, Miss Evans,” McGonagall said before moving past Bones inside.

Bones stepped outside and met Lily’s gaze. “Coming inside?” he asked.

"I suggested it, remember?" she said coolly.

"Ah, yes," Bones nodded. "Let's go."

They walked side by side to the Gryffindor Tower, Lily still energized enough to run eight more laps while Bones was shuffling in his dressing gown.

"You know, there was an odd discovery in this old classroom today," he said casually. "Nearly every Hogwarts Death Eater was hexed pretty badly."

"Interesting," Lily said calmly.

"How do you think that happened?" Bones asked, watching her closely.

"Who knows? Death Eaters are always picking fights. Probably bit off more than they could chew."

"They must have run into someone strong enough to take them all down. But they aren't talking. Do you know anyone powerful enough to take on a dozen Death Eaters in training?"

"The Headmaster," she said thoughtfully. "You probably could, if you had some emotional blackmail to use on them."

"You won't get in trouble for it," Bones said, rolling his eyes. "I'm just curious."

"Trouble for what?"

"Beating up the Death Eaters!" he exclaimed. He took a calming breath. "So if you had done it, why do you think you would have?"

Lily rolled her shoulders back. "Completely hypothetically, they might have caught at a time when I was in the mood to hurt someone and then tried to pick a fight with me. They might just have been acting

like I was supposed to be intimidated by them. Maybe they were just being annoying.”

“Any idea why none of them were Stunned?”

“Well, if I had been the one to beat them up, I probably wouldn’t have wanted it to be obvious that it was me. Besides, then I would’ve had to go back and wake them up.” She sighed. “Too much trouble.”

“It’s a good thing that you never fought them and thus never had the temptation to Stun them,” Bones remarked calmly.

“Right down lucky,” Lily said.

“So you’ll be of age next Thursday, right?” Bones asked, having worn out the other topic.

“Legal Apparation,” she mentioned, nodding.

“As opposed to...”

“Illegal,” she said flatly. “The opposite of legal.”

“You know, you have quite an attitude when you’re not acting,” Bones noted. “Personally, I think this suits you.”

Lily made a small, noncommittal noise and looked away.

“No, really,” Bones said as they went up the stairs to the third floor. “I’d rather have backtalk than silence any day.” Lily didn’t answer. “Were you really running?” Lily nodded once. Bones growled irritably. “You’re doing that on purpose just to annoy me.”

Lily shrugged and glanced out a window as they passed it. The night looked as innocent and enticing as ever, but she knew somewhere in the darkness evil was lurking, preying on good.

“So, are you having a party?” Bones asked casually as they neared the Tower. “For your birthday?” he clarified when she held her silence.

She shook her head, surprised he had even asked. “Hm... That’s no fun.”

Lily shrugged and looked forward at the portrait of the Fat Lady. "Aulophobia," she said to it.

The Fat Lady jolted awake. “What are you doing up? Oh, hello Professor Bones.”

"I caught Miss Evans out of bed," he told the portrait. "Just escorting her back."

“All right,” the Fat Lady said, swinging open to reveal the dimly lit Common Room and Lily stepped inside.

"Night," Bones said as the portrait close over the hole.

“Sweet dreams,” she muttered sarcastically.

[illegible]

“You’re up early,” Lily noted when she recognized Tonks’s footsteps coming down the girls’ stairs. “The Great Hall doesn’t open for another hour.”

"I know," Tonks said, shuffled over to join Lily on the couch. "But so are you."

"Actually," Lily said, leaning back, "I'm just up really late."

Tonks gave a surprised laugh. "You've been up all night? You must be exhausted. I can never pull an all-nighter. At sleepovers I was always the one waking up covered in shaving cream."

The side of Lily's mouth pulled up. "That's annoying."

Tonks shrugged. "Tradition. So this one time I loaded up on coffee and coke, you know, to stay awake. But I fell asleep first anyways."

Lily allowed herself a chuckle at Tonks's expense. "So, how have your classes been going?" She asked politely.

"Fine, but... there's this one spell. I mean, I'm really good at Defense and Care, but Charms... Anyway, it's that one that makes something bounce. Do you think you could help me?" She hurried on, giving Lily no time to respond, "I mean, I know you're busy, and that you might be a little mad for what happened during Christmas, but I really need your help."

"Of course I can help," Lily said, suppressing a smile at the lengthy speech.

By the time the other Gryffindors began to venture into the Common Room, Tonks was able to bounce a quill around the room, to the amusement of some of the older students who began reminiscing in the days when the hardest spell dealt with levitation.

"We should probably head to breakfast," Lily said once Tonks felt sufficiently competent at the charm.

Tonks nodded once, then frowned. "Didn't James want you to wait for him?"

Lily clenched her teeth briefly. "And he became in control of me... when?"

Tonks looked at her disapprovingly. "He's just trying to help," she said reprovingly.

Lily found herself unable to control her mouth. "I'm almost six years older than you. Don't presume to tell me what to do."

Tonks looked hurt, making Lily instantly guilty. "I wasn't telling you what to do," she mumbled. "I was just... never mind."

Lily wanted to apologize, but couldn't bring herself to say the words. "We can wait for the boys," she said stiffly, looking slightly over Tonks's navy hair.

Luckily, they didn't have to wait long before the four boys met them in the Common Room. "Lily!" Potter exclaimed.

“Yes,” she said, lips tightening.

“Let’s hurry! I’m starving!” Black moaned.

Lily rolled her shoulders back, suppressing her weariness. "Let's go."

[illegible]

“Who’s that from?” Potter asked. Lily quickly took the scroll from the owl and slipped it into her pocket, shrugging. “No one, I’m sure,” she lied smoothly. What could possibly be so important that Severus had sent her a note in such an obvious manner?

“Hey, Prongs, did you do Slughorn’s homework?” Black asked Potter, mouth full of toast.

“Uh, no,” Potter said. “Remus?”

The boy rolled his eyes and finished the parchment from his bag. “Go ahead,” he said needlessly.

The two Marauders snatched the homework and began to scribble it onto their own parchments. “All morals are set aside at such desperate times,” Remus commented to Lily. “Which means they copy my homework every morning.”

“Don’t exaggerate,” Black admonished his friend, dipping his raven quill into his neon ink again. “The professors don’t assign homework every night.”

“Well, except readings,” Potter added, dusting a bread crumb from his paper. “But who does those?”

“Me,” Remus said pointedly.

Potter rolled his eyes. "Don't you have Head Boy things to do?" he asked, though his grin showed that he was joking.

"Actually, I do," Remus said, checking his watch. "We're supposed to be setting up the Hogsmeade schedule for March."

"Speaking of Hogsmeade," Potter said, turning to Lily and giving a confident, if slightly nervous, grin. "Why—"

"Forget it," Lily warned. "I'm not allowed to go." At their interested expressions, she admitted quietly to Black and Potter, "I got a letter from... Either way, Dumbledore wants me to stay in the castle."

"Are you even safe here?" Black asked, casting a dark look at the Slytherin table. "This castle's full of rats—no offense, Peter."

"None taken," Pettigrew said immediately.

Lily narrowed her eyes. "You told Black," she accused.

"You mean about the Slytherins ambushing you?" Potter said. "Of course not. I was sworn to... secrecy," he finished, trying to smile. "Uh, sorry?"

"They ambushed you?" Black asked sharply, half-rising from his bench. "I'll show them."

Lily rolled her eyes. "Sit down, Black. I don't need chivalry. Far from it."

Potter laughed lightly. "Apparently, she totally kicked their—"

"Innocent first year ears!" Black exclaimed, clapping hands over Tonks's head. "Quiet, James," he scolded. "Wait," he said suddenly. "Even Bellatrix?"

"Yes," Lily replied reluctantly.

He released Tonks's ears. "About bloody time! I've been waiting for you to do that since I... um, thought about it."

“Protect the innocent ears,” Potter remarked him mockingly. “You’re already, what, eleven? You’re fine.”

"Twelve," Tonks corrected. "Well, in a few weeks."

Potter clapped his hands. "That reminds me! Lily, when's your birthday? I've been meaning to ask for a while."

“Next Thursday,” she muttered.

“When?” Black asked loudly.

“Next Thursday,” she repeated.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Tonks reprimanded. “Now we only have a little bit of time to get your presents.”

“Don’t,” Lily said. “It’d be... suspicious looking.”

“We won’t tell them,” Black said, waving a dismissive hand. “Besides, how could we just ignore your birthday. Finally legal!”

Lily rolled her eyes and shook her head. “Don’t even think about getting me stuff,” she warned.

[illegible]

Severus leaned against the cool stone wall directly behind the portrait of Morton the Megalomaniac. He closed his black eyes and waited.

What if she didn't come? Did she still hold a grudge against him? What if she told the Marauders that he had wanted to meet with her? What if someone else happened to enter the secret passageway? What if she hadn't gotten the letter? What if she had, but forgot to read it? What if she had refused to read it? What if—

“Severus?” asked a quiet voice directly outside the portrait. “Are you there?”

“Lily,” he said, relieved. She pushed aside the portrait and stepped into the small hallway. The wall torches illuminated her vibrant red hair, but also the dark bags under her eyes. “How are you?” he asked, inspecting her closely.

“Tired,” she admitted. “Didn’t sleep last night,” she elaborated.

Severus sighed. “You need to sleep,” he reprimanded. “Keep yourself healthy.”

Lily matched his sigh and leaned back against the wall. “Do you remember giving me the Rosake Drought? Don’t answer—I know you do. About three weeks ago the super-powers kicked in.”

Severus made no comment. If she wanted to reveal the whole story, she would. “I just had to get away,” she said in a softer voice. “I thought that Fairfield’s dying was my fault.” She paused. “I robbed Gringotts,” she admitted with a quirky half-grin.

“I had a feeling that was you,” Severus interjected, smiling gently. “How much did you steal?”

She met his eyes. “About 700 million galleons.” Severus couldn’t think of a suitable reply to that. “Then I went to America.”

“Is that where they caught you?” Severus asked quietly. “Why did they though?” he continued without letting her answer. “You weren’t hurting anyone. Don’t you deserve freedom?”

“I can be free once He’s gone,” she said. “But I need to be here to stop him.”

“It’s not your responsibility,” Severus said in a cajoling tone. “Refuse to help them, promise not to hurt anyone again and leave. Petunia’ll be fine in their hands. They owe you. Now they know that the Stunner’s under control.”

“The Order’s not the onlb

"The Order's not the only ones I'm worried about," she muttered.

"What then, Death Eaters? Lily," he urged, "forget everyone else. Take care of yourself."

"What about you?" she asked. "Would you let yourself get caught in a war that will never end because I ran off?"

"I'm not concerned about my fate," Severus said dismissively. "I'm worried about you."

"How very... Gryffindor of you," Lily said, amused.

"Not really," Severus said, disgusted. "I'm still only concerned with one person."

"Only your view's shifted from you to me," Lily reminded him. "Listen, Severus... It's not just Death Eaters and the Order. I've been given a task, a fate, and I have to fill it."

"No one can control your future unless you let them," Severus said quickly. "Just forget everything else. Everything I've done so far has been to help you. Now you're at a place where you can negotiate."

"If I could negotiate, do you think I'd be back here?" Lily asked, voice losing some of its friendliness. "Bones and... others just proved to me that my fate rests on the whims of other people."

"What others?" Severus asked desperately. "My plan was that I'd be under others' control so you wouldn't have to be."

"The best laid plans..." Lily quoted. "I'm sorry that you got into this." She put her hand on the portrait to push it away.

"Lily," he pleaded.

"Goodbye Severus," she said before walking out and leaving him alone.

[illegible]

The Facebook group now has five members that I've never met. YAY! We're still looking for more people though! Link's on my profile!

"Hey guys, I'll see you later," Remus said as they left their last class. "I need to go to the library now."

"Bye," Sirius and James said. "Have fun 'studying,'" Sirius added.

"Oh yeah," James said, a smirk on his face. "Today's your study date with that Ravenclaw. Cathryn Addison, right?"

Remus narrowed his eyes at their teasing. "It's not a date," he said stiffly. "I'm teaching her that charm we learned last week. She had the flu."

"I bet that's not all you'll be teaching her, eh?" Sirius gave a low whistle. "Didn't know ya had it in ya, mate."

"Goodbye," Remus said irritably, checking his watch.

"And he doesn't even try to deny it!" Sirius cried as Remus walked away. The Gryffindor nudged James. "We need to get him a girlfriend."

"We tried once, remember? That Amanda girl in sixth year. Disaster," James said, reminiscing.

"What ever happened to her, anyways?" Sirius asked as they headed towards the Gryffindor Tower. "I thought she was nice."

"You only picked her out because you thought she was hot," James reminded him. "Ended up having all the brains of the Giant Squid."

"Ah, don't be so quick to judge," Sirius scolded as they entered a secret passageway. "I've heard the Giant Squid is quite loquacious."

"Big word," James commented teasingly.

"I know," Sirius said proudly. "Got it off Remus."

"Aulophobia," James told the Fat Lady. Once they were in the crowded Common Room, James asked, "So, what do you want to do?" They headed automatically up the stairs towards their dormitory.

“Actually,” Sirius said slowly. “I thought we could just talk.”

“Sure,” James said easily, leading the way into their dorm room. “What’s up?”

Sirius leaned against his bed post, silver eyes watching him closely. “It’s about Lily,” he said carefully.

James leapt up from the bed he had sat on. “Is she okay?” he asked, already walking towards the door.

“Prongs,” Sirius sighed. Something in his voice made James turn back. “I know we said that she wasn’t dangerous, but—”

“If we agree that she’s not dangerous, then what’s the problem?” James said hotly.

“I... Mate, this isn’t easy, especially with you standing there looking like you’re about to kill me. Can you just sit down and hear me out?” Sirius asked suddenly. James complied, crossing his arms and leaning back in a chair.

“Now, I like Lily, I really do. I think she’s funny, when she’s not all guarded, and I think she’s a smart person. But I think that being here, under the influence of all the Slytherins is... I dunno, weakening her morals.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” James asked dangerously.

“It means I’m not sure what she’d do if she was provoked. It means I think she’s too unstable. What she needs is either complete isolation from them, or complete isolation from us.” Sirius groaned and ran a hand through his black hair. “Stop glaring at me. You know it’s true.”

“I don’t,” James argued. “I think she’s sticking up for herself fine.”

“Some people are able to live double lives. Lily can’t. Can’t you see? Either she keeps her guard up around us and them, or she lets her guard down and acts normal around us and them,” Sirius reasoned.

James thought it over. “What exactly are you suggesting? While she’s in school she has to be around all of us.”

“She’s been in school with all of us since first year,” Sirius reminded him.

“But we didn’t hang out with her before,” James said, confused. Sirius face him a knowing look. James blinked. “Are you saying we should start ignoring her?”

“So Voldemort doesn’t catch on that she likes having snowball fights more than hanging out with us.”

“You want to just abandon her?” James exclaimed furiously.

“If Voldemort finds out she’s working with the Order, she’s as good as dead,” Sirius replied. “I’m saying this because I care about what happens to her. We should back off until Dumbledore moves her to a safe house or something.”

“He’s not going to. Don’t you get it?” James burst. “She’s his best shot for getting at Voldie. He has some plan—he’s controlling everything! I don’t think he cares if she’s happy as long as she’s helping him. So I don’t know about you, but I’m stopping her from seeing Voldemort ever again.”

“How?” Sirius said, exasperated. “Prongs, mate, you’re acting insane.”

"I don't know," James said. "But I'm going to."

[illegible]

“Don’t you think you could make one exception?” Edgar asked.
“She’s been through so much because of us.”

Dumbledore leaned forward. “You’re confident it would be safe?”

“Well, anything around Lily can be dangerous if she’s in the mood, but I’m sure she can handle it as long as we don’t p—make her mad,” Edgar reasoned.

After a long moment, Dumbledore nodded. "It'll be in your office on Thursday morning," the Headmaster promised.

[illegible]

Having finally lost Potter in the crowd of students heading for dinner, Lily looked from side to side before Disillusionment Charm on herself. The bustling students didn't notice the moving piece of wall headed towards the front of the school.

Making sure that no one was paying attention, Lily creaked open the castle doors and crept down the front stairs, blending in with the dark gray stones. The gloaming light made it difficult for her to see, so she morphed her eyes to those of her Animagus wolf.

Silently, Lily slinked over to the bushes at the edge of the forest where she had hidden her broomstick the night before. It was there, hidden under the brambles and covered partially in dirt.

She brushed off the excess filth on it and stood up. Suddenly there was a commotion as something crashed through the forest towards her. Wand out, she pressed against the bush, eyes sharp.

A horse-like beast approached her, smoke billowing from its scaly muzzle. Before she could decide between a Stunning spell and another hex, a larger figure pounded up and grabbed the beast around the neck. “Whoa there, Sparkles! What do ya think yer doin’?” asked the burly grounds-keeper, patting the beast’s neck.

When the strange skeletal horse continued pawing the ground and puffing short bursts of flame towards the Disillusioned Lily, the giant man peered into the darkening grounds. “Ello?” he asked. “Is anyone there?”

Lily stepped forward, morphing her eyes back to normal and making herself visible before redirecting her wand at the creature who, upon seeing her clearly, lunged forward and swiped at her with monstrous claws.

The large man pulled him. "Down," he scolded. "This is jus' Sparkles," he told Lily, grinning. "'E's 'armless, really."

Lily stared at the dragon-clawed horse disbelievingly. Seeing Lily not moving her wand, the grounds-keeper said, "Sparkles is all talk. It's 'is dragon-'alf, ye see? Ye jus' scared 'im a bit."

Lily eyes the creature distrustfully. "It's breathing fire at me," she pointed out.

"Ah, that's jus' 'ow 'e says 'ello," he said amiably. "Bu' 'e don't really like wizards, so if ye'd jus' put away yer wand, 'e'd be 'appier."

Lily nodded grudgingly and stored her wand in her pocket. The creature watched her cautiously, but did not attack as she had feared. "See?" The large man asked. "So, why aren't ye at dinner?"

She paused. "Wasn't really hungry," she said finally. "What is that?" she asked, eyes on the scaly beast.

"Ah, Sparkles? 'E's a... er, 'e's a thestral," the man stumbled.

"That breathes fire?" Lily asked increuloulsy.

"Well, 'is mum's a dragon," he admitted. Lily decided not to ask how that particular pairing had come to be. "'E's 'armless," the man repeated, releasing the beast's neck.

"Interesting," she said, looking over the hybrid. "Is he your only one?"

Looking delighted at her curiosity, he said, "Well, Sparkles is one of a kind. Bu' I got an int'resting lil unicorn thestral mix babe. Actually," he said, peering at her contemplatively. "'Ow would ye like to 'elp me train 'er?" he asked.

“Pardon?” Lily asked, surprised.

“Well, it wouldn’t be ‘ard,” he reassured her. “But unicorns like girls better’n boys, which fits ye. And I need someone who cen see ‘er—cuz of her thestral ‘alf. And that fits ye too.”

Lily paused, unsure how to answer. That would be an interesting diversion from her stressful life, but even if she agreed, would her guards let her? Dumbledore had warned her only hours ago not to go outside alone. Then again, he wasn’t in complete control of her. Not if she refused to let him. Besides, it would present a good way to avoid Bones. “Sounds good,” Lily said after a moment.

“Why don’t ye come by after school on Friday to meet ‘er?” the man asked, grinning widely beneath his large beard.

“Thank you...” Lily trailed off, unable to bring his name to mind.

“Ye can call me ‘Agrid,” the man said affably.

“I’m Aria,” Lily lied smoothly. Just in case he mentioned meeting her to one of the Order. “I’ll see you then.”

“Bye,” he said. “C’mon Sparkles. Back in the woods wit ya.” As the groundskeeper lumbered back into the Forbidden Forest, Lily shook her head, thinking of the thestral dragon’s chosen name, picked up her Black Phoenix broom and headed back up the castle.

Since the students had, by then, finished dinner, Lily was able to slide into the crowd exiting the Great Hall, broom hidden carefully under her cloak.

“Lily!” called a voice. Potter pounded up beside her, panting. “Where were you?” he asked.

“Just taking a walk,” she said easily.

Potter frowned. “Alone?”

“Yes,” she said forcefully, annoyed that he had asked the same question the professors had before. “Alone.”

“Lily,” he sighed. “That’s dangerous.”

“Sod off, Potter,” she muttered, walking slightly faster.

He kept up easily. “What if you’d been attacked? The Forest is full of creatures,” he reminded her.

As they started up the main staircase, Lily rolled her eyes. “Do you honestly think anything in there could possibly pose a threat to me?”

He looked stumped at that. “I guess not,” he concluded.

“Besides,” Lily continued, “that groundskeeper can take on anything out there.”

“Hagrid?” Potter asked. “Yeah, he’s tough—on the outside. He’s not as intimidating as he seems,” he assured her. Catching her look, he said, “Not that anything intimidates you anyway.”

Rudolphus Lestranger passed them then, eyeing their apparent friendliness suspiciously. She met his dark eyes levelly, a scowl tugging at her lips. An interesting brother-in-law. Her lip curled as her thoughts moved on—Bellatrix would be her sister-in-law.

“Are you okay?” Potter asked, looking at her sharply. “You look pale...r than usual,” he said.

Lily blinked and smoothed out her face. “I’m fine,” she said smoothly.

“So, I never got around to asking, but I hear you’re an Animagus?” Potter said quietly as they stepped onto another staircase.

Lily stumbled slightly when, in her surprise, she forgot to lift her broom with her step and it got caught on the previous step. “Are you okay?” Potter asked, though she had righted herself immediately. She nodded briskly, annoyed he persisted in thinking her so incapable. “So.... Animagus?”

“Yes,” she admitted.

“He’s one too,” the Mark said suddenly. “It leaves a mark on their magical aura.”

“What’s your form?” Potter asked.

“A wolf. Yours?”

“A stag—I mean, a form? What form? I don’t know what you’re... eh,” Potter stuttered, running a frantic hand through his hair. Lily rolled her eyes. Potter looked from side to side to make sure no one was watching. A little Hufflepuff girl passing them on the stairs caught his suspicious gaze and she froze like a deer in headlights. Potter stared at her intensely as they passed.

“Stop scaring the Hufflepuff,” Lily admonished.

“Sorry,” Potter said immediately, breaking the small girl’s gaze. She bolted down the stairs.

“When’d you get your form?” Lily asked smoothly. Finally she had the blackmail. “And why?”

“Fifth year,” Potter admitted. “To help... a friend with... a problem.”

“Indeed,” Lily said coolly. “Your form doesn’t really say much for your Gryffindoric qualities,” she noted.

“I’ll have you know that it’s a noble and strong animal,.” Potter said heatedly.

“A deer?”

“Technically,” he stressed, “it’s a stag. Antlers and all.”

“An—” Her mind flew back to one winter night, one that knocked over the first domino in the chain of all her Order dealings. “A stag. Ever meet a werewolf?” she asked slowly.

Potter, being completely inept at lying, gave a nervous laugh and spluttered, “Re—who—what—I—Wait, what?”

“And a big, black dog?” Lily pressed as they arrived at the Fat Lady’s portrait.

“Aulophobia,” Potter quickly told the Fat Lady. When they entered the slowly filling Common Room, Potter muttered to her, “We can talk in my dorm.” Lily raised an eyebrow, but, because Potter was such an obviously chivalrous gentleman, agreed to go up. Still, she was glad that nobody seemed to notice them.

“This is... messy,” she commented when they entered the dormitory. It was true. Discarded books, robes and even Dungbombs were strewn all around the small room.

“Sorry about that,” he said, running a hand through his hair nervously. He pulled out his wand, gave it a swish and the majority of the clutter flew over to, if the trunk in front was correct, Black’s bed. Once it had piled into a precarious pile, Potter jerked the curtains closed around it and turned back to Lily. “Have a seat,” he said, gesturing to a couple of wheeled chairs scattered around the room. The boy glanced at the door as though expecting his friends to appear.

Lily cast a spell to rid the chair of all crumbs before sitting down. When Potter simply paced in front of her for a minute or two, she prompted, “A werewolf and a dog...”

Potter flung himself on the chair nearest her. “It was you,” he mumbled.

“It was me...?” Lily repeated.

“That day, that night, I mean. Remus got out of the shack and attacked those two people. I recognized Snape, I think. And I saw a girl—you, I guess,” Potter said thoughtfully.

“Then I got back into the castle, Stunned Filch, got Moody after me, which got me captured by the Order,” Lily finished for him dryly. “What a great night.”

Potter was staring at her as though unsure how to react. “Wait a moment,” Lily said suddenly, thinking over his previous words. “Are you telling me that Remus is a werewolf?”

But Potter was watching the door to the dorm, mouth moving silently. Lily whipped around to see Remus in the frame, looking stunned.

“I...” croaked Potter behind her. “Moony, I didn’t... She...” he trailed off as Remus’s face hardened. “Sorry.”

“I...you...” Remus began, amber eyes flashing. He scowled, shook his head and left the room, pushing past Black, who had just arrived.

“What’s with him?” Black asked, confused. “Oh, hey Lily.” He looked between the two of them quickly, blinking. “What’re you doing in here?”

“I’m leaving now,” Lily announced, sliding past Black and hurrying down the stairs after Remus. She had wanted to know, and was glad to have found out, but not at Remus’s expense.

The Common Room was full of clusters of chatting students, but none of them was Remus. Lily slid out of the room quickly, emerald eyes

scanning the outside hallway. "Curfew's soon," the Fat Lady warned her, but Lily ignored her, hurrying forward.

"Point me Remus," she muttered to her wand. It spun several times over her palm before hovering towards a small hallway to her left. The loud crash from that direction made up her mind.

Lily slinked down the hallway, instinctively shying from the silver light from the half moon washing through the window.

Lily's wand led her to the closed door of an abandoned classroom. She jiggled the knob, then muttered, "Alohamora," and pushed it open.

Remus was facing away from her, an upturned desk before him. "Go away," he said clearly, but quietly. Lily closed the door behind her and stepped forward. "I said—" he whirled around. "Lily?" he said incredulously. When she just watched him silently, he turned back to the window. "I'm surprised you're still talking to me, knowing that I'm a monster." His voice was bitter.

"You talk to me," she noted dryly.

The lycan frowned. "That's..." he trailed off in his denial. "I'm always worried about the reaction I'll get when... I was so surprised that James would tell you without...I didn't think you'd understand."

"Of course I could never understand what it's like to carry around a dark secret that would cause people to immediately assume I'm evil," Lily said easily. "I can't even begin to imagine what that would be like."

Remus gave a weak chuckle and turned back to her. "I'm sorry for acting like that," he apologized, smiling gently.

Lily met his smile with one of her own. "Do you recall when the Order first learned who I was? I trapped you all in a pillar of fire—you've got nothing on bad reactions."

Remus, though looking surprised at her casual reference to the past, laughed. "Right," he agreed. "Maybe I'll go more extreme next time."

Lily gave a dignified nod. "Now got tell Potter that you don't hate him. I thought he was going to cry or something."

"All right," Remus said. He started towards the door. "Coming?" he asked when she didn't move.

"No," Lily said. "I'm just going to walk around for a while."

Remus nodded and passed her. Once he was out of the room, Lily walked over to the window and stared solemnly at the moon. So often she had taken comfort in its presence—awed by its ability to control the ocean, loathing the sun for dictating her view of the world. All the while she empathized with the celestial female it had been haunting Remus during both night and day.

A soft sigh escaped her mouth as her gaze shifted from the moon to her own pale reflection. The last night she had managed to sleep was Tuesday, and it was already Friday. She felt as though if she kept moving she could better cope with her dark fate. If life hadn't been hard enough with both sides of the war getting control over her, now she had a long-dead school founder with a hand in her future too.

Keeping her emotions at bay had, thus far, made her weaker in the face of conscience-obsessed people like Bones. Though having a steady release of emotion had to be healthier than her sporadic torrents, she couldn't afford it—the price would be her life.

What could she do? Bones had proved she couldn't run from the Order, Voldemort, despite her knowledge that he was truly human, was vastly more powerful than she was and, once he came and got her, he would stop her from running from him and the Mark of Salazar was helping both sides to contain her.

Lily leaned against the windowsill and pressed her forehead on the cold glass, her breath creating a circle of white, and closed her eyes. She wondered as she stood there what Bones would say if he realized how similar he was to the Dark Lord. Both removed her

freedom under the façade of helping her. Both took away everything she loved without a second thought.

Onyx had grown so close to her. How was he handling being cheap entertainment for passersby again? Hopefully the zoo was taking better care of the cobra than the snake charmer had.

Her emerald eyes shifted back to the moon. Remus only had to worry about having a destructive power once a month. Then again, Dumbledore could undo any damage she wrought on Hogwarts.

...Right?

Why hadn't Dumbledore woken Bellatrix last month? She had never even thought more of it, but surely he would have tried—prolonged Stunning spells were unhealthy. It was just the Rosake Drought that had made her Stunner stronger than his spell, she assured herself. He had been able to wake Filch before Christmas break. The school was safe from her under Dumbledore's care if she lost control. She hoped.

She turned from her pallid reflection and left the room, gliding through the castle, not caring where she was going, only that she was moving. Any distraction from her thoughts.

She didn't want to think any more at the moment.

Just wanted to get another chapter up before the big day! By the way, this story will not be taking anything from DH into account.

Also, in the OOTP movie, the Stunning spell just knocks people backwards. Obviously, that is not the case in this story.

James spotted Lily the moment he entered the Great Hall—the pale redhead was sitting alone at the end of their table, methodically shredding a piece of toast into small bits on her otherwise empty plate.

He sat down on her right side. Remus went to her left while Peter and Sirius claimed the bench across from them.

“Marauders,” she greeted calmly, not looking up.

“Morning Lily,” James said cheerfully. “How’re you?”

“Fine,” she said, picking up another slice of toast to tear up.

“Not tired?” he muttered to her. She didn’t falter in shredding the new toast. “You didn’t come back to the Tower last night.”

“What’d you two put for question 21 on Flitwick’s homework?” Remus asked loudly, giving Lily and James an opportunity to talk without the rest of them listening.

“We had homework?” Peter asked, terrified.

Remus raised an eyebrow. “Didn’t you go to the library to finish it last night?”

“Oh yeah, I guess I forgot,” Peter muttered, turning red.

“So can I see it?” Remus prompted him.

“I, um, don’t know where I put it,” Peter said quickly.

James leaned in to Lily. “Are you even going to eat?” he asked her, looking at the pile of shredded bread on her plate.

“Maybe,” Lily said evasively, picking up another piece of toast.

James frowned and, without warning, dumped a spoonful of eggs on her plate. She paused in her tearing and looked at him. “Eat that,” he instructed.

Lily rolled her eyes and picked up her fork. She put a bite daintily in her mouth and chewed. "Happy?" she snapped.

"Finish it," he said, watching her levelly.

After giving him an extremely annoyed look, she complied. As she ate (and James kept an eye on her to make sure she did), he turned to Sirius. "Hogsmeade Valentine's Day is on Saturday," he reminded him.

Sirius nodded. "Fun, right?" His voice, strangely, was laden with sarcasm.

"Not able to find a date?" James asked, half-teasing.

"I'm not asking anyone," he said, frowning. "I'm staying in the castle." He stubbornly took a bite of his pancakes.

James decided to confront him later in a less crowded area later. He gave him a look to convey that. Sirius looked away from him to Remus, "So, Moony, how'd it go with you and Cathryn?"

"Do you want some pancakes?" James asked, facing Lily, who had finished her eggs. "Or waffles? Strawberries? Pineapple? Bacon?"

Lily rolled her eyes. "I'm not..." she trailed off when James placed a pancake on her plate, quickly followed by a few pieces of bacon.

"If you won't tell me what you want, I'll give you everything," he warned, dropping a strawberry on top of the bacon.

Lily drew her wand and banished the food on her plate. Before James could protest, however, she picked up a powder-sugar covered waffle and set it on her gold plate. "There," she said, beginning to cut it up.

James grinned at her and, though she didn't smile back, her eyes had a sparkle in them that he had not seen before.

Severus walked into the Potions classroom, eyes deliberately averted from Lily's side of the dungeon. He sat down, immediately picking up his Advanced Potions text to finish repairing the book's recipe for Vertiserum. The idiot who had written the book marked it as three scoops of mooncalf dung instead of two and a half, which Severus knew worked quicker. He scribbled out the printed text and scribbled his own instructions in the corner. He dipped his quill in again, but did not write more. Someone had sat down beside him.

“These spells,” Severus said slowly, snapping his book closed on the still wet ink, “are not for you. This book is not for you.”

“Actually,” Severus said tersely. “I don’t need anyone dying from one of my spells. They could track it back to me.” The Slytherin stashed the book in his bag and met Bellatrix’s eyes levelly. “So you can stop taking them and handing them off to certain Marauders.”

“Off topic,” Severus told her. “You’re not permitted to give away my spells, especially not for free. And especially not to Pettigrew.”

“Hello class!” greeted Slughorn, standing up from his desk. “Today we’re going to finish brewing our Amortentia! Instructions are on the board. By now your potion should have turned pink.”

“You’ll do all the work again, right?” Bellatrix ascertained, leaning back in her chair coolly. Severus did not answer her, deciding to take out his anger by finely powering a spoonful of June bugs. He didn’t want her to ruin his work in any case. “So, she’s back again. Has He written back yet?”

Severus gave a tense nod. “What’d he say?” Bellatrix asked eagerly, leaning forward.

Quietly, Severus told her, “We’re to wait for His signal.”

“To do what?” she asked, eyes wide in anticipation.

“He didn’t say, exactly,” Severus said tersely. He sprinkled the crushed beetles into potion along with a half-cup of tarantula saliva before stirring twice counter-clockwise. He set his timer for 55 seconds. “He said we would understand later.”

“I hope it’s soon,” Bellatrix said wistfully, leaning back again. “Maybe we’re supposed to kill her,” she said thoughtfully, jerking a thumb in Lily’s direction.

“I doubt it,” Severus said as calmly as he could. Was that really what the Dark Lord had meant? Surely not.

“A girl can dream, right?” Bellatrix shrugged. She gave a small sigh. “Now that would be fun.”

“You’ve lost every duel you’ve ever fought with her. What makes you think next time will be any different?” he asked, eyes intent on the timer.

Bellatrix gave a dark chuckle. “I only have to win once.”

The timer buzzed once and Severus waited exactly five seconds before tossing in a beozar. The potion glowed bright red before settling into the finished result.

“Thirty points to Slytherin!” Slughorn exclaimed, bustling towards them. “Miss Black and Mister Snape! Fastest I’ve ever seen it done.”

"It wasn't that hard," Bellatrix drawled. Severus kept a composed face. His ego didn't like other people taking credit for his work.

Slughorn ignored what she said in any case. "This is just how it's supposed to look! You two may smell it, though none may leave this classroom. Strictly prohibited!"

"Professor..." moaned Rudolphus from nearby, staring at his green bubbling potion with wide, frightened eyes. "I think it's alive."

As Slughorn hurried away, Bellatrix gestured to Snape. "You first."

"I'm fine," Severus said, purposefully breathing through his mouth. "You go ahead."

Bellatrix looked suspicious. "I insist."

"Ladies first," Severus reminded her.

She cautiously moved her head forward and breathed in the potion. Her face immediately relaxed and a smile grew on her face. The smile, so vibrant and wild, made a chill run down Severus's back. "Snakes," she announced.

Severus didn't want to hear what else she could smell, so he used his hand to waft the mist towards his nose. The first, most obvious scent was the bitter mix of herbs attached to potions and the sweet musty smell of tomes of ancient knowledge. Subtler, woven inside the heavier scents, was a crisp flowery smell blended with the icy purity of night.

"So..." Bellatrix urged when Severus made no movement. "What do you smell?"

Severus leaned back, brow furrowed. "Roses..." he pondered. Why would he have smelt roses?

Bellatrix paused, then gave a sharp laugh. "You," she said delightedly, "smelled roses?"

Severus ignored her, thinking hard. The others all made sense... Roses? HE suddenly felt Bellatrix's presence at his ear. "Guess what perfume Cissy orders special from Paris?"

The bell rang to dismiss the class at that moment so Severus did not respond. HE quickly banished the potion and calmly set his supplies into his potions kit.

"If you didn't finish yet you can work on it tomorrow," Slughorn said in exasperation when he saw Sirius Black throwing random ingredients into his cauldron.

Bellatrix left the room, shaking her head at Severus's love. Severus watched her go, uncertain what to do. She was going to go tell Narcissa, who'd tell Lucius, who was a dangerous, high-level Death Eater.

Severus hurried out of the room, looking for Bellatrix in the hallway. "Bellatrix!" he called.

She turned, looking amused. The other students in the hallway gave them wide berth—Bella had quite a reputation. "Yes?" she asked, smirking.

Severus gave his wand a small flick and watched her eyes go briefly dull. "Snape?" she asked. "What do you want?" Her eyes flicked around the hallway, confused.

"We were going to Defense, remember? I just have to stop by the dorms." Severus watched her reaction closely.

"Oh, right," she said, acting as though she remember. "Well, don't let me stop you."

Severus nodded his head in a mock-bow and triumphantly watched her walk away. No one would ever know. To the world, Severus had to appear invincible.

Maybe it would keep him alive.

After her last class on Friday, Lily slipped away from Potter (a difficult thing to achieve) and headed down to Hagrid's cabin. Luckily the February was too cold for the rest of the students, so she didn't have avoid anyone.

She paused at the front door, unsure whether she wanted to do this. Then she took a deep breath and knocked.

"Ello?" called Hagrid. "Aria?"

"It's me," she affirmed, listening to his heavy footsteps approaching the door. He opened the door and Lily was struck again how vast he was.

His hairy frame filled the doorframe, but his dark twinkling eyes showed his kind nature. Lily wondered if one of her Stunners could affect him. "Ye ready to see 'er?" he asked eagerly, and Lily pushed the thought from her mind, annoyed at herself.

She nodded in reply, so he led her around the back of his cabin. "Just a bi' inter the forest," he told her. "No need ter be scared. I'll protect ye."

She didn't bother telling him that no collection of trees and wildlife could scare her. "How old is it?" she asked instead as they started into the forest. The giant man pushed trees so far out of his way that, if Lily stayed close enough, she was easily able to avoid the backlash.

"Ah, she's just a weeks," he told her. "Right beaut. Mom's a thestral an' da's a unicorn, but neither wants anythin' ter do wit' each other or the babe now. Well, norm'lly, ye see, thestrals and unicorns stay far off from each other, right? But this un must've gotten so lust potion run-off from the school—I tell Slughorn just ter banish the extra, but no, e's got to throw 'em inter the forest. Somethin' 'bout the soil or summat."

"That's rather stupid," Lily observed. "The magical effects of the potions don't dissipate just because the plant absorbs it, not unless it's a black thorn bush, which has proved to be impervious to all

magicks.” She stopped talking then, remembering that she wasn’t trying to pass some test, whether set up by the school or Dark Lord.

“Black thorn, eh?” Hagrid repeated thoughtfully. “I really oughter line the edge of the forest with ‘em, then.” He led them into a small clearing where he had set up a small stable. “Useful information,” he noted. “What year’re ye in again?”

“Seventh,” she admitted. “But I picked that up from some... summer reading.”

“Books can be downright helpful,” Hagrid said wisely. “All righ’, you ready ter see ‘er?”

Lily nodded, approaching the smalle, poorly-made stall. “You made this?” she asked, inspecting it.

“Yep,” Hagrid affirmed proudly. “Now c’mon, she’s pro’bly awake.”

Lily peered over the wooden door and met a pair of curious eyes. They were the near-black silver of a Dark Patronus, though shining with energetic youth. The small half-breed was strange to see; it was as skeletal as any other thestral, though a pale silver color and sporting leathery white wings. On its forehead was a small black horn.

“Cute, ain’t she?” The sound of Hagrid’s voice made the foal’s thin ears perk up and its mouth to open to reveal small fangs. “Thinkin’ about namin’ her ‘Viper.’ What’d ya think?”

Lily looked doubtfully at the creature. “Seems more like a Shade to me.”

“Shade,” he repeated, rolling it over his tongue. “Not Viper? What about Flying Death?”

“Save that for a male one,” Lily advised.

“Shade it is. Wanna go in?” he asked, unlatching the stall door.

"Of course," she said calmly. Hagrid grinned and opened the gate and allowed Lily to enter before clicking it shut behind her.

"Now, Aria," Hagrid said. "Make sure ye don't show your fear or anythin'. She's very perceptive 'n' 'as a bit 'o a pride thing."

Lily approached the filly confidentially. The thestral unicorn watched her cautiously. "Now jes' 'old out yer 'and. She's a curious un." She did as he instructed, waiting patiently for the babe to approach.

Cautiously, taking careful steps, the filly got closer to her, velvety muzzle outstretched. Gently, Shade sniffed Lily's hand and gave it a gentle nudge. "See?" Hagrid said happily. "Wha' a sweetie. A'ight Aria, now all ye gotr ter do is stay still 'til she's comfortable."

Shade started slightly when Lily nodded, but stepped back forward immediately. The small half-breed seemed entranced by the new person, as well as soothed by her calm authority.

"You're not here to play with babies," the Mark said, annoyed. It had been sharper with her since she had cut off its tail. "Avoiding your destiny is futile."

"Not avoiding. Postponing. Ignoring. Not avoiding," Lily replied quietly. Shade, instead of being frightened by the Parseltongue, seemed relaxed, but curious.

"Eh?" Hagrid asked, eloquent as always.

"Nothing," she said to him, keeping her voice soothing.

"The longer you deny it, the harder it will be for you," the Mark said.

"Wazzat?" Hagrid asked, voice becoming more shrewd.

"We'll talk later," Lily hissed. "Just talking to myself," she told Hagrid. "Seems to calm Shade."

Oddly enough, it was true. While normal creatures naturally shied from snakes, Shade seemed nothing short of intrigued. Lily stood

silently by Shade for a few minutes before slowly raising a hand and petting its silvery white mane, avoiding the small horn. Lily had petted him for several minutes before realizing that it was nearing dusk. Slowly, she stepped away from the foal and exited the pen.

Hagrid was grinning as she approached him. "What'd I tell ye?" he asked. "Adorable. Now, er, Aria, what'd 'll ye say ter taking care of 'er for me? I cen't do it—if I get

'er scent on me, the unicorns and thestrals'll avoid me for a week. Ever trained a 'orse?"

"No," she answered, stepping carefully over a thorn bush in the darkening path. "But I think I'll be fine."

"Bet so," Hagrid said confidentially. "I cen jus' set out some food fer ye e'ry day. Cen ye do that fer me? Ah'll pay ye a bit too."

"Sounds good," Lily confirmed. By now it was so dark that Lily had difficulty discerning Hagrid's bulk from the rest of the forest. She quickly morphed her eyes to those of her wolf form to make better use of the stars to illuminate the path. Briefly she thought of Potter. How would having a stag Animagus ever come in handy?

"Ye'll 'ave to try out diff'rent foods," Hagrid informed her. "Shade migh' like meat, like 'er mum, or flowers like her da." He gave a loud sigh. "I'm so glad I found ye. I thought I'd 'ave to give 'er ter the Ministry 'n I know they wouldn't really love 'er. Now she cen be 'appy."

Lily nodded faintly in the gloom, though he couldn't see her. "Good," she agreed.

"You're getting soft," the Mark admonished. "If Aurors attacked you right now, would you win?"

"Yes," she replied, annoyed.

"Feeding unicorns won't keep your wits sharp," the Mark reminded her.

“Listen,” Lily spoke to quietly. “If I train for a few hours a night will you shut up?”

“Yes,” the tattoo hissed back before curling up under the sleeve of her robes and out of sight.

“Thank you,” Lily said sarcastically.

“Eh?” Hagrid asked, leading her out of the forest.

“Nothing,” se said. “So, I’ll just come back tomorrow.”

“The food’ll be right ‘ere,” he said, gesturing to his back step. “Ye wanna cuppa ‘fore ye go back ter the castle. I think ye missed dinner,” he said guiltily.

Lily paused. “All right,” she accepted. “Thank you.” Quickly she unmorphed her green eyes.

“C’mon in,” he said, opening the door to his cabin. “I’ll put on some tea.”

“So,” Lily asked as she sat at the table. “Where do you keep Sparkles?”

“Ah, Sparkles? Well, ‘e looks so much like a thestral that I jus’ let ‘im stay wit’ the ‘erd. They don’t care that ‘e’s jus’ a little diff’rent.”

“You mean the whole breathing fire problem,” Lily ascertained.

“That ‘n the scales ‘n claws,” Hagrid agreed.

“The thestrals don’t mind a half-dragon, but won’t ever touch a unicorn mix?” Lily asked.

Hagrid, having set a large pot on the fire, and set an earthenware cookie jar in front of her. “Well, thestrals ‘n unicorns are jest too diff’rent, righ’? Like black ‘n white—fire ‘n ice... life ‘n death. ‘Sides,

way I see it, the thestrals see unicorns as weak. They treat the babe like she's diseased or summat."

"But why don't the unicorns take the baby?" Lily asked.

"It takes a lot ter kill a unicorn, so most've em' 'aven't seen death, so they cen't see thestrals, righ'? They smell 'em though. Don't like carnivores much, unicorns." They sat in silence for minute. Hagrid, apparently uncomfortable with silence, said, "'Ere, 'ave a cookie."

Lily opened the cookie jar and took out a small chocolate chip cookie. It was a dark brown color and, as she found out when she tried to take a bite, extremely hard. When Hagrid turned back to the kettle, Lily morphed the front half of her teeth into wolf shape so she could tear off a chunk of the cookie then chew with only slightly sharper back teeth.

Hagrid turned back with the large kettle and filled up two huge mugs to the brim. "Do ye like the cookie?" he asked eagerly.

Lily nodded, mouth tightly closed. He waited until he turned to get the sugar bowl before ripping off another bite. "Sugar"?" Hagrid asked. "Milk?" Lily shook her head. He shrugged and added both to his own mug. Remembering Bones, Lily took a cautious sniff of her tea, glad to sense no potions within.

Hagrid didn't seem like the kind to slip a potion into a person's tea in any case. He had an open air to him and there were no potions ingredients in his cabin, unless they were hidden in the cabinets. Besides, unless he was an expert Occlumens, he had no negative feelings or suspicion towards her.

"How're yer classes this year? Gettin' ready for yer NEWTs, righ'? Makes classes 'arder, usually," Hagrid asked casually.

Lily masked changing her teeth back by taking a small sip of her tea. "It's not too bad," she said honestly. She had missed quite a lot during her weeks in America, but she had already known most of the material and caught up quickly in all her classes. All, that is, except

Defense—she refused to spend any extra time near Bones by going in to make up work.

“NEWTs are in, wha’, three months? This year’s goin’ by real fast,” Hagrid observed.

Three months and she’s be back with the Dark Lord. “Yeah, it is,” she agreed. She drank more of her tea, ignoring its scalding heat, before popping the rest of the cookie into her mouth and taking another sip to make it easier to chew. “What are you going to do with Shade once she gets older?” Lily asked when she had finished her cookie.

“Ah’ll ‘ave ter see,” Hagrid said sadly. “Depends on ‘ow she turns out.”

Lily nodded. “You’ll let me know, I hope?”

“I think we’ll be able ter tell ‘fore school lets out,” Hagrid told her. “Speaking o’ that, what’re ye planning on doin’ once ye graduate?”

Oh, just working for Voldemort. Blackmail, Stunning, you know, the usual, Lily thought. “I don’t know yet.”

“Ye should work with animals. Ye’ve got a special talent,” Hagrid said solemnly.

Like talking to snakes? “I haven’t taken Care since fifth year,” Lily told him briefly.

“Can’t stop ye, really. Education from school can only teach ye so much,” Hagrid said, obviously uncomfortable. “I got expelled in my third year,” he admitted gruffly. “But I see more animals ‘n anyone.”

“I’ll think about it,” Lily lied. She couldn’t imagine what would happen to her if she told Voldemort that she’s rather take care of baby unicorns that Stun for him. “I should probably be heading back. Curfew’s soon.”

“Aight,” Hagrid said, rising to open the door for her. “I’ll se ye around. Stop by fer teaw whenever ye want and talk ter me if ye ‘ave a problem wit’ Shade.”

“I will,” she assured him before heading back up to the bright castle, eyes back in wolf shape.

She gave a small sigh as she entered the school. Maybe Potter and Bones hadn't noticed she's skipped dinner. Shrugging off the thought, she went to her dormitory to grab her broom. For the moment she'd just worry about her training like the Mark had advised.

[illegible]

“She was with Hagrid,” Sirius said. “Perfectly safe. If I had to be in the forest with anyone, it’d be him.”

“At least she’s back in her dorm now,” Remus reasoned as James paced in front of them.

"I'm going over there," James decided suddenly, walking over to grab his broom.

“Really James,” Remus said, exasperated. “You’re not her father and you’re not in charge of her.”

“Keep acting like you are and eventually you’re going to piss her off,” James warned.

“Remember before? I helped her scare off Voldemort!” James burst. He could help her, he knew he could.

Peter walked from the bathroom at that moment. “Vol...” he stuttered. “What about him?”

“Relax, Petey, he’s not gonna get you,” Sirius said mockingly. “Honestly, you can be such a wimp sometimes.”

“Nuh uh,” he argued. “James, do you hear this?” he said, looking for back-up.

"You are kind of wimpy," James said frankly, resuming his pacing.

“At least I don’t obsess over some girl who hates me,” he snapped in an uncharacteristically sharp way.

James whipped his head around to glare at Peter. "You don't know what you're talking about," he growled.

"I know more than you do," Peter argued, eyes dark.

“Uh huh,” James said with a condescending chuckle. “Sure you do. All right.”

Peter scowled at him, stalked over to his bed and drew his curtains closed around him. They glowed white for a minute, indicating a Silencing Charm being placed over them. Sirius stared at the now dull curtains for a moment, then turned back to James, eyebrows raised. "What's got his pants in a bunch?"

James shrugged, looking back at the map. He saw Lily's dot had migrated from the safety of her dorm to the Quidditch Pitch. Without another thought, James grabbed his broom and darted out of the window, despite Remus's yelp. What was she doing?

[illegible]

“How many hours?” Lily asked the Mark tensely, landing in the center of the pitch.

“As long as it takes,” the tattoo said vaguely.

Lily took a slow breath to calm herself, then began jogging around the edge of the pitch. She moved at an easy pace, letting the gentle pounding over her feet drown out her thoughts. The night air was still and crisp, turning each breath she took into a reenergizing boost.

“Run,” the Mark instructed. She easily slipped into a swift sprint. Running without the benefits of either her wolf form or the powers from the Rosake Drought was much less entertaining, but she worked with what she had. Besides, in most instances it was better to keep talents like being an Animagus a secret when running away so the element of surprise remained intact in need be.

Between what were going to be nightly work-outs and taking care of Shade, Lily would definitely be breaking Dumbledore’s no-going-outside-alone rule on a regular basis. The defiance was exhilarating, though she tried not to imagine what would happen if he found out.

“Move on,” the Mark instructed after several laps. Lily slowed and jogged to the center of the pitch, drawing her wand as she did. In the near-complete darkness of the stadium, Lily closed her eyes and relied on her other senses to direct her. She lunged forward, rolling on the grass before hopping back up and whipping around and sending a Stunning spell at the far-end of the stadium. She turned and sent a trio of white-hot fireballs across the pitch, followed in rapid succession by a variety of similarly damaging hexes.

She opened her eyes to inspect her work. In the starlight, Lily could make out her initials burned into the right end of the stadium seats. Annoyed, she noted that the middle prong of the ‘E’ was off center.

After repairing the incinerated benches with a few spells, she muttered to the Mark, “Can I go now?”

“For today,” the Mark, responding coolly to the bitter note in her voice. “Now sleep.”

Lily summoned her Black Phoenix broomstick and then soared up into the night sky, the frigid air whipping into her. Ignoring the tattoo’s order, Lily landed on the top bench of the stadium and laid back on it. Above her there was naught but a sliver of the moon and millions of stars.

The gentle sounds of bugs and other animals coming from the Forbidden Forest were soothing. She could the creature from which each sound came. There was a trio of centaurs at the edge of the

forest, muttering quietly to each other. Just as Lily began to focus on their words, the sounds of their conversation drifted away as they moved back into the woods.

Lily morphed her ears to their wolf shape to hear deeper into the forest. The sound of her own breathing was predominant, but she could hear the rustling of fairies darting around in some secluded glen, the quiet shuffles of small mammals, the steady sound of someone breathing about twenty yards over her...

“Stupefy!” she exclaimed, aiming her wand above her with the precision and speed of a cobra. There was a gasp as the red light hit and a rustle as the spy fell off their broom and their Invisibility Cloak slipped off. Lily quickly assessed the situation, mind slowing things down. Whoever it was should be interrogated and stopped from repeating anything to Dumbledore or Voldemort, whoever they worked for. But she was tempted to let anyone who would spy on her fall to their deaths.

As the person passed where she was on her bench, falling towards the ground outside the pitch, Lily caught sight of tell-tale messy black hair.

Potter.

Lily snatched her broom and dove off the top of the stadium after him, mounting her broom as she fell. The ground was getting closer to Potter’s unconscious form, so Lily urged extra speed into her broom. For a moment she was annoyed—what kind of illegal broom can’t even keep up with gravity?—before it suddenly shot off, letting Lily get close enough to Potter to catch him with still enough room to pull from the dive.

She slung him over the front of her broom before going in for a slower, more controlled landing than he had been about to have. The moment her feet touched the ground, she let Potter slide off into the grass and pulled her wand back out. “Ennervate,” she intoned quietly.

Potter's hazel eyes snapped open. "Lily?" he said with bleary eyes. He looked around, confused, before his eyes suddenly cleared. "I wasn't spying on you," he said immediately. At Lily's raised eyebrows, he hurried on, "I mean, I saw on the Map that you were out here and decided to watch you in case someone else found you."

"I should burn that map of yours," Lily muttered.

"Huh?"

"Nothing," Lily replied. "How long were you watching?"

"An hour... or two," Potter said uncomfortably.

"And by an hour or two you mean the whole time?" Lily asked, lips pursed.

"Um, yeah," Potter admitted. "Cool spell," he added when she didn't answer.

She rolled her eyes and put out her hand to help him to his feet. He blinked when he appraised her in the faint light. He opened his mouth, then closed it again. "What?" she asked impatiently.

"Your ears," he said, gesturing.

Quickly, she changed her pointed auburn ears back to her pale human ones, along with her altered eyes. "How do you do that?" Potter asked, squinting his eyes in an attempt to change himself.

"Practice." Seeing that he was waiting for a more elaborate description, she said, "You just focus on the feature you want to change. It's like full-body morphing, only more concentrated. Try it."

He squinted his eyes again and Lily watched, trying not to laugh at his expression. After a minute or so when Lily was about to tell give up, light brown hair spread his hair over his face as his nose lengthened and his hair vanished to reveal two long antlers and tufted ears.

“Good job,” Lily congratulated. He peeked open one eye. “You got your head,” she said at his confused look.

He reached up a hand and felt his pointed antlers, then his elongated face. But when his attention drifted, he slipped back into his human form.

“That was good,” Lily praised. “Considering it was your first time.”

“I was trying for just the antlers,” he said, frowning slightly. He shrugged. “I’m tired. Wanna go back up to the castle?”

Lily picked up her broom from the ground. “Yours is over there,” she said, nodding towards his fallen broom. “And your cloak...” she looked around, “got caught up there. I’ll grab it,” she offered, hopping on her broom and kicking off.

When she snatched the silver cloak from the uppermost bench, Potter zoomed past her on his broom. “Race to the Common Room!” he called over his shoulder.

Lily calmly donned Potter’s cloak then zipped after him. The night wind whipped around the silvery fabric as she sped forward, quickly overtaking him. She reached the Common Room well ahead of Potter, so she situated herself in one of the plush armchairs to wait, cloak stowed next to her chair with her broom. The room was empty and the fire was dwindling at the late hour.

Potter landed and immediately looked out the window to wait for her. She cleared her throat, and he turned, mouth agape. “But..” he said, blinking and gesturing silently to the window and then to her. “You...”

“We should race again sometime, Potter,” she said, rising, broom in hand and giving him back his invisibility cloak.

“Call me James,” he said, grinning as he accepted the cloak. “You’d be a bloody brilliant Quidditch player. Gotta play with us sometime.”

“Maybe someday,” Lily said off-handedly. When hell freezes over and Voldemort joins the Peace Corp. “Goodnight, Po—James.”

Please review. One of my favorite chapters I've written so far is next (Valentine's Day) and I'll update it quicker the more reviews I get!

The Great Hall the next morning was covered in vibrant pink and red streamers, off-setting the ancient power etched in each worn stone of the walls. Tonks, with her usual individuality, had changed her hair into a flowing white with pink tips that matched the heavy blush on her cheeks.

“These are delicious!” she exclaimed, taking another bite of her heart-shaped pancakes.

Black, meanwhile, was poking his plate of red eggs and pink bacon. “I’m not sure about this,” he said, eyeing his food distastefully. Keeping with his usual tradition, he sported a hot pink scarf draped over his neck. What surprised Lily was the absence of a girl on his arm.

“Not going to Hogsmeade?” she assessed, raising an eyebrow.

“Thought I’d stay with you and Prongsie. Got the castle to ourselves. More fun than any old town,” he said cheerfully. Lily, with her honed Legillimency skills, could tell he was holding something back, but didn’t press for more information, figuring he meant no harm. “Hey, Remus, are you sticking with us today?” he asked, drawing the attention from himself.

Remus blushed to match Tonks’s pancakes. “Um, no.”

Black gave a small whoop. “Finally plucked up the nerve to ask Cathryn out?”

“Actually,” Remus cleared his throat, “she asked me.” He seemed flustered by Black’s dropped jaw. “What?” he asked defensively.

“What kind of Gryffindor are you?” Sirius asked, shaking his head. “The Ravenclaw had more nerve than you. Sad, mate.”

“I’ll have you know that I was about to ask her when she asked me,” Remus said, annoyed.

“Ah, but she still beat you to it.” Black shook his head in mock disappointment. “Are you going into town, Petey?”

“Just going to grab some candy and quills and stuff,” Pettigrew replied. “No big deal.”

“You’re rather quiet this morning,” Lily noted to James.

He yawned as he grabbed another piece of pale pink toast. “Up late,” he reminded her. He slathered a bit of butter onto his bread. “What was it, midnight? One?”

“How would I know what time you went to bed, P—James?” Lily asked with a small smile. “I’m not stalking you.” She took a sip of her pink pumpkin juice. “Remus, could you please pass the waffles?” He obliged and she set one on her plate. “Black, the sugar please?”

“Oh sure, call me by my surname,” Black grumbled. “James, do this. Remus, do that. Albus, Minerva, hey. Oh, hello Harold. Pass the sugar, Black.” He handed her the powdered sugar bowl.

“Thank you Sirius,” she said politely.

Pettigrew stood up. “I need to go back to the room,” he said. “Forgot... something.”

“Have fun in Hogsmeade,” James said before yawning again as Pettigrew walked away.

Lily pursed her lips. “Get a backbone. You still slept, what, six, seven hours?”

“I’m still t-tired,” he mumbled.

“It’s so cool they’re letting the whole school go to Hogsmeade. I always thought the third year rule was stupid,” Tonks was saying Remus.

“Security’ll be tight,” James muttered. “I bet the village is closed to anyone but Hogwarts students. Dumbledore wouldn’t risk it otherwise.”

"I hope so," Lily said quietly. Voldemort wouldn't risk another attack on Hogsmeade, would he?

"Will all the students heading to Hogsmeade begin forming a line at the front doors?" Dumbledore announced. His robes were dark red with white swirls that day, drawing some of the attention from his hot pink wizards' hat. "Seventh years first, please." There was a shuffle as students began moving forward.

"That's me," Remus said, rising from his bench. He was straightening his robes when he met a short, brunette Ravenclaw at the end of her table. He produced a rose from pocket and they were on their way.

"Quite the ladies' man," Sirius noted, giving a snicker. "Such a cliché."

Potter suddenly coughed, turning bright red.

"You all right, mate?" Sirius asked, worried.

"I, um, yeah. I'm good," James said, swallowing hard. "Yeah, uh, roses are so cliché. I mean, who—"

"You got Lily roses, didn't you?" Sirius said dully.

"Yeah." He turned to Lily. "Can I give them to you in the Common Room?" He looked around the Great Hall. The only people remaining were them and students still straggling towards the line out of the building.

Lily sighed. "All right." She wasn't sure how to react, so the three of them walked in near silence up to the Gryffindor Common Room. Sirius, annoyed by the absence of conversation, began singing loudly.

"You can shut up now, Padfoot," James said when they reached the Fat Lady's portrait. The painting nodded her head, cringing at his attempt at singing. The portrait suddenly flew open, revealing Pettigrew. "Oh, hey, Peter. You need to hurry. They're already leaving."

Peter gave a startled squeak and ran past them without a word. The three remaining students entered the Common Room then, and James turned to Lily. "Well, everyone loves a good cliché, right? Expecto Patronium!" A bouquet of red roses shot from the tip of his wand. He grabbed them in one hand, and then said, "Rosrojoncamenta," he intoned, handing them to her with a flourish. The spell caused the flowers to slowly fade between red, pink and white, reminding Lily of Tonks's hair.

Lily took them warily, unsure how to react. Seeing her dazed expression, James added, "Oh, and here. Permenete. Now they won't fade. Just put them in a vase and watch them."

"Watch them," she repeated.

Sirius slapped James on the back. "No one like you to take a cliché to the farthest extreme. At least you didn't get her lilies."

Potter flushed again. "Accio vase," he said, gesturing to his dorm with his wand. Down flew a tall blue crystal vase with elegant white lilies-of-the-valley engraved on the side. "I kind of overdid the flower theme," he apologized.

Lily gave Sirius a glare because his laughter was becoming obnoxious. "They're wonderful," she assured him. Inwardly she was uncertain, though not just about the clashing nature of the two presents. Potter had gotten her a Valentine's Day present? Roses? "I'll go put them in my dorm," she said, placing the roses in the vase. "Thank you."

She went up to her dorm, trying to decide where to put them. Finally she choose on her bedside table where they would be out of view of her gossiping roommates.

She met the boys in the empty Common Room. James grinned, "So I was just talking to Padfoot and we have a great idea. Today shall be the—"

“First Annual Valentine’s Olympics!” Sirius finished. “Including a wide assortment of challenged, running, magic, debating and stand-up comedy!”

“Well, not really those last two,” James said, scowling at Sirius. “You in?”

“The question is,” Lily said calmly, “is can you handle a humiliating defeat at my hands?”

“Is that a challenge?” Sirius asked, raising his eyebrows. “Bring it on, Evans.”

“Where exactly are we doing all this?” Lily asked the boys. “And what do I need?”

“Your wand and your broom. We can go down to the Pitch when you’re ready,” James said, excitement in his voice.

“Accio Black Phoenix,” Lily thought. The broom was in her hand within seconds and she nodded for the boys to lead the way.

On the way down, Sirius took full advantage of the empty castle by running down the halls ahead of them, banging on random, annoyed suits of armor. Several portraits instructed the boy to slow, but he simply cackled and ignored them.

“You do realize,” James said seriously as they walked several hallways behind Sirius, “that I’m going to have to beat you in Quidditch today. No more going easy on you.”

“Same,” Lily returned calmly. “So how’d you come up with this?”

Sirius’s idea, actually,” James replied, getting on to a moving staircase with her. “Do you remember that other incident with one of these staircases?” he asked suddenly.

Lily answered, “Unfortunately. Never attempt to follow someone on one of these again. Next time there might not be a net.””

"It seems like forever ago," he said thoughtfully. "Back before we didn't know. You should've heard some of our theories."

"Pray tell."

"Oh, er, most had to do with you being the unknowing victim of the Stunner," James admitted.

"Are you serious? Don't even think of that pun," she warned swiftly.

"Wouldn't dream of it," James said easily. "Yeah, we thought Marvolo Smith was the Stunner, or something. I mean, we eventually figured out who he was..."

"You saw through Voldemort's disguise, but not mine?" Lily asked incredulously. She gave a small laugh. "This competition's in the bag."

"Oh really?" James said, laughing. "We'll just have to see about that, eh?"

"I suppose so," Lily replied as they exited the front doors.

Sirius was waiting for them in the center of the Quidditch\.. "Oi!" he shouted over to them. "Over here!"

They joined him in the middle, and he pulled out this wand. "Incendio!" he exclaimed, setting his scarf on fire to initiate the first annual Valentine's Olympics. "First challenge," Sirius said, "'is a foot race! Let's stretch for five minutes first, and then we can start. Good?"

"Let's do this," James said, bending over to touch his toes.

"Nice," Lily commented.

"Quidditch," he said in an almost apologetic tone.

"You know, I've missed every match this year," she noted as she bent backwards into w bridge.

“You’ve got to come to the final match—us versus Hufflepuff for the Cup,” Sirius said.

“Sounds like a real nail-biter,” Lily said sarcastically.

“Hey,” said Sirius, straightening. “Those Hufflepuffs can be downright deadly—though they’re nothing to you,” he said as an afterthought.

“Let’s just race already,” James said, saving Lily from replying. “All right, line up here. Run from here to that goal and back. We can leave out brooms as a marker.”

Lily carefully set her black-market broom by their legit Silver Arrows. “Let’s go,” she said, tapping her robes with her wand to turn them into black work-out clothes.

“All fancy,” Sirius said. “We’ll, I’m going old-fashioned,” he smirked as he pulled his robe over his head to reveal baggy navy shorts and a well-toned chest.

James paused. “I’m going with Lily,” he said finally, changing into a tight red shirt and loose black shorts.

“Cold?” Lily asked Black, who was hopping in place in the chill February air, shivering.

“N-no,” he objected. “Just excited. Ready?” he said quickly. “OnetwothreeGO!”

Lily bolted from the starting line, feeling speed gather with her and enjoyed the combined sounds of her black tennis shoes on the frozen grass and Black’s grunt of surprise when she passed him. She sensed both boys far behind her when she tagging the goal and turned back, overlapping them near the middle. Seeing she had beaten them with time to spare, Lily relaxed next to the broomsticks, inches from winning.

“That...is...mean!” panted Sirius as he and James noticed.

"Cruel," the other decided, straining in the chill winter air to beat the dog Animagus. The two dark-haired boys were right next to each other as they neared the line. Lily stood up and casually stepped over the line when they were feet away, then watched as Sirius threw himself forward and passes the brooms inches in from of his best friend.

"Second!" he exclaimed, giving himself a pat on the back.

James took a deep breath. "Let's...just move... on," he said though heavy panting.

"Animagus races... next," Sirius, pulling his robes back over his bare chest.

"That sounds good to me. We'll just need to set some privacy wards."

"Why did...we...decide to race...against her?" Sirius asked, annoyed by her obvious lack of exhaustion.

"I'll set them while you two get your breaths back," she said, pulling out her wand. She cast a quick sensor spell to see if anyone else was in the arena and, to his dismay, found a person sitting invisibly in the stands. Recalling her rapid judgment on Potter the pervious night, she settled on a simple Immobulus and revealing charm. "Bones," she said, resigned.

"Wazzat?" James asked. Sirius looked over and, once he caught sight of the frozen Auror, nudged his friend and pointed. "Oh, hey Edgar!" James called. His expression turned to one of consternation when he realized why Bones wasn't answering back.

Lily sighed and removed her spells with the flick of her wand. "You need to leave," Lily said after casting a Sonorus charm on her voice. "I'm setting up wards."

"I'll be quiet," Bones said, coming nimbly down the stairs. "Or maybe I can judge. Maybe referee." He reached the bottom of the stairs. "You're good at running," he noted.

"You would know," Lily said, pretending not to remember the voice-enhancing charm was still on.

Bones shook his head sadly. "Always jumping to the negatives," he observed. "Would some optimism kill you?"

"Probably," Lily said bluntly. She removed the charm on her voice and turned to her two companions. "We need to lock down. Do you want him in or out? Certain planned events will have to be cancelled."

Sirius, in his usual rash fashion, solved the problem swiftly. "James and I are illegal Animagi," he told Bones. "And," he added, seeing James's horrified look, "you can't get us in trouble. You've let Lily off the hook for tons of illegal things."

"The events of these Olympics will stay strictly between us," Bones swore. "I'll forget about all things seen here today."

Lily looked him over distastefully and said with the faintest edge of resignation, "Come stand in the center with the two criminals here while I set the wards."

"Would you like any help?" Bones offered as he complied. "Defensive magic was always my strong point."

"No." Lily stepped forward and recast the awareness charm to ascertain no one had snuck into the pitch while she had been handling Bones before non-verbally casting several layers of wards over the stadium. She finished with a swish and flick, bathing them in a faint purple light before turning back around.

"I saw the Net, the Orb and Bol's Pentagon," Bones told her, "but what was that last one?"

Lily considered saying something sarcastic about his 'strong point', then settled with the less snarky response of "The Callaway Cover stops anyone from noticing the field, much less all the spells on it."

"Good idea," Bones said approvingly. "So, shall I be a spectator, judge or ref?" he asked the three students.

“Spectator,” Lily said automatically.

“Ref,” James said at the same time.

“Commentator!” Sirius exclaimed.

“Commentator it is,” Bones said, ignoring the other two votes. He waved his wand and conjured himself a table at the edge of the field. He cast a Sonorus Charm on himself before saying, “There are three athletes competing in today’s events. First we have Sirius Black. He’s a tall—”

“6’2!” Sirius yelled.

“A 6’2 athletic seventh year. He may be unorthodox, but he’s determined to win.” Once Bones finished his bio, Sirius bowed to silent applause from the stands.

“Next is James Potter. He’s also a tall athlete. He’s ready to prove his worth after a humiliating defeat in the first round.” Bones was obviously enjoying his role in the event. “And last we have Lily Evans! She’s short, but don’t let that fool you! This athletic Parselmouth really knows how to win! The first challenge here today will be...”

“Animagus race!” Sirius called to him.

“...a race to see whose Animagus form is swifter! They will begin at the line marked by the brooms, run around the goal posts and back. On the count of three, change into your form. When your transformation is complete, you may begin racing,” Bones announced. “Three, two...one!”

Lily fluidly morphed into her wolf shape and leapt forward, feeling the brittle grass beneath her auburn paws snap delicately. “And in the lead we have Lily Evans as a wolf. Now Sirius Black is out of the gate and—what’s this? It seems James Potter has only managed to transform his head! Oh, wait, there he goes. He’ll have a bit of catching up to do now. Evans is already near the goal post with Black

only yards behind. But look now, Potter is speeding down the field! Look at him go! At this rate he might actually catch up!”

Lily’s sinewy body bounded around the goal post, slanted eyes focused on the finish line. However, when she turned and her nose was suddenly able to pick up James’s scent clearly, her speed slowed. For being annoying, James sure smelled... appetizing. Saliva began to pool in her mouth—She shook the thoughts from her head and fought to regain her previous speed. Sirius, however, having roamed with James every month, was accustomed to his scent and used Lily’s distraction to catch up to her.

“And the two dogs are neck and neck as they approach the finish, James not too far behind. Now Lily’s in the lead, now Sirius. Now Lily, now—Sirius wins!” Bones gave a whoop and leaned back in his chair. “Makes me wish I had gone through with getting a form.”

Bones’s form would be a fly, Lily decided as she morphed back into her human form. He was mostly harmless, but more often than not so annoying that you just wanted to squish him.

“Next, I assume from the brooms, will be a Quidditch competition,” Bones said. “There will be a speed and a tricks level. And a double point Snitch round,” he added when Sirius yelled it out to him. “Grab your brooms and line up in front of my table. Let’s do five laps. Ready? Three, two, one, GO! And they’re off! Whoa, did you see that?” he exclaimed to his nonexistent audience.

Lily had shot off at the countdown, going, as advertised on her broom’s box, from zero to sixty in two seconds. As though knowing the course she wanted to take, the broom automatically hugged the edge of the pitch. She overlapped the two boys in a red and black blur. Lily nudged a little more speed into her broom so that she was finished with her laps by the time the boys started their third lap.

She dove for the landing, pulling to a stop so quickly that she nearly flew off the front of her broom, only staying on at the cost of skinned hands. She sat purposefully several yards away from Bones, healing her palms with the tap of her wand.

“Despite Lily’s near immediate win, the boys are still fighting for second place! Neck and neck into their third lap they seem to be evenly matched,” Bones announced. “Both have new brooms, though obviously neither compares to Lily’s unidentified one.”

Lily flexed her newly healed hands and leaned back in the grass, wand resting loosely in her right hand. “Anything you’d like to say to ruin the fun?” Lily murmured to the Mark as she closed her eyes.

“This doesn’t count as your training,” the Mark told her at the top of her shoulder so she could hear it. “The more you like it here, the less likely you are to try to escape.”

“Are you saying you think I like it here?” Lily said dully. Unfortunately, and dangerously, the statement was becoming more and more true. Yes, she was still a pawn, but now she had a thestral-unicorn mix to tame and two quite enjoyable friends.

“Yes,” the Mark replied. “But you must remember that this will all be gone when heir collects you. To fulfill your destiny, you must forget all of this and take your place as the Stunner so you will remain in position to—”

“Stop the radical heir,” Lily quoted dutifully.

“But for now, you may act as you please,” the Mark finished.

“Of—” Lily stopped when she heard a step in the grass near her head. “Protego,” she exclaimed. She opened her eyes and saw her shield deflecting a stream of water overhead. When the assault ended, she let the blue shield dissipate and stood up to confront Sirius. “Water?”

“You looked so peaceful,” he explained. “The race is over.”

“James won,” she assessed from Sirius’s lack of gloating and Potter circling the field in a victory lap. “Well, don’t take it out on me—it won’t work.”

“Besides,” Bones added, having watched with plenty of amusement, “you’ll get the chance to win again in the other games.”

“Fine,” Sirius grumbled, stowing his wand in his pocket. “But I’m not competing in the magic round.”

“Why not? Bones asked. With a shiver in the February air, he conjured a cup of hot cocoa. “It’ll be fun.”

“Only if you don’t mind losing,” he said, pouting.

James landed from his victory lap and looked from Sirius’s dejected expression to the amused looks on Bones’s and Lily’s faces. “Don’t worry. He’s just a sore loser.”

“Am not!” Sirius exclaimed, offended.

“He just quit the magic round,” Bones informed James, trying to suppress a grin.

“You try dueling Lily,” Sirius shot at Bones.

Lily, thoroughly delighted with the notion, turned to Bones. “Yes, Bones, why don’t you take Sirius’s place from that round? Sirius can be commentator.”

“Good idea,” James said, winking subtly at Lily.

“Works for me,” Sirius said.

“You all think I couldn’t beat a couple of seventh years,” Bones scoffed.

“This from the man who gave himself Veritaserum?” Lily drawled. Both Sirius and James stared incredulously at Bones for a minute, and then burst out laughing.

“All right, I’ll duel. But you still have two more broom rounds,” Bones reminded them.

“Let’s do this,” Sirius said. “Tricks. Bones’ll judge—fairly.”

“Even if I didn’t judged fairly, it’ll be even because you’ve all insulted me the same,” Bones said good-naturedly.

“I’ll go first,” James offered.

“Okay, so three minutes to do whatever you want. I’ll keep track of each trick and the score. Highest cumulative wins.” Bones conjured a clock over his table. After a moment of contemplation, he added a scoreboard and assigned the pointes as won so far, which was one each. “ Three, two, one, go!”

James shot into the sky, executing a quick roll immediately. His entire performance consisted of twists, dives and rolls, some executed so close to the ground that Lily doubted he’d be able to pull up, though he proved her wrong every time. He finished with one last shocking dive.

“James has a great score. Let’s have Lily up next!” Bones exclaimed, grinning in anticipation.

Lily mounted her broom and zipped from the ground and circled the stand quickly once. What to do... She slowed and, after round the goal post again, slowly moved her hands towards the muddle of the broom and gingerly raised herself into a handstand. She held it until she reached the other side of the pitch when she had to get down to steer the broom. Next she dropped down and dangled from the broom for a minute before executing several chin-ups.

The rest of her routine was generally the same, relying on her broom’s artificial intelligence to maneuver for her while she did tricks. She landed, which resulted in another set of skinned hands, and had barely sat next to James when Sirius picked up his broom. “The broom will fall if I’m not on it, right?” he asked suddenly.

“I think so,” James said cautiously.

“Good enough for me,” Sirius muttered, pushing off. Immediately he did a roll just as James had done before going into a random loop-de-loop pattenen in the sky. He got into a smooth rhythm with extremely accurate figure eights and spins.

When the clock read twenty seconds left, Sirius went several dozen yards above the ground and suddenly rolled over and dropped from his broom. Lily whipped out her wand, but James stayed her hand by saying, "I think that was on purpose."

Sirius and his broom plummeted towards the ground, picking up speed. Mere yards from the ground, he reached over and snatched his broom up and slowed on it, pulling into a smooth landing.

"And, for sheer stupidity, Sirius wins that round!" Bones announced, shaking his head. "That put him at first place along with Lily."

"That," James said, high-fiving Sirius as he approached him, "was awesome. I want to try that sometime."

"You both are complete imbeciles," Lily said dully. "Are you insane?" she asked Sirius.

"Clinically," Sirius said, nodding solemnly. "Runs in the family."

"No joke," Lily muttered, thinking of his relatives.

"Last in the broom category is catching the Snitch," announced Bones. "I guess we'll just let out a Snitch and the first person to catch it wins," Bones summoned the box of Quidditch balls from one side of the stadium and set the small golden ball loose.

Lily snatched up her broom and shot into air after it, but its swift darting did not work with the sheer speed of her broom, and she quickly lost sight of it. High above her James hovered, scanning the pitch methodically while Sirius slowly circle the stadium.

Lily followed James's example, swooping up and morphing her eyes into their wolf form, giving her sharper view, though the colors were dulled. Glints of any kind caught Lily's attention from Bones's watch to the silver benches. It was relaxing for Lily to fall back into her normal attentive mode, emotionlessly analyzing everything around her. She could sense every time James, who was several feet below her, would turn to look at a certain area, so she felt sure that he

wouldn't be able to get to the Snitch before her. She also kept an eye on Sirius, watching for any sudden movements.

Suddenly James shot down in a steep dive, aimed almost straight down. Lily followed instinctively, leaning tight on her broom to increase speed. Looking below her, she couldn't see the Snitch. Where was it? They were only a few dozen yards shy of the field when she caught a sudden intensity in James's motions.

With surprise she realized that Potter was faking having seen the Snitch, so she pulled out her dive with slight difficulty and swooped back up. Seeing that his plan didn't work, James pulled back up also. Sirius, meanwhile, was at the far end of the pitch, bearing down on a tiny glint of gold.

Lily aimed towards the Snitch, but Sirius had already caught it by the time she reached it. "And Sirius wins again! If the result would have been the same if Lily and James had not been preoccupied with that clever Wronski Feint, we shall never know," Bones said loudly.

"I won because of pure talent," Sirius called to Bones. "This just made their defeat less humiliating."

"Let's get on with the duels," James said, pulling up beside where Sirius and Lily still hovered. "I want to see this."

Lily, however, was beginning to doubt her decision to duel Bones—if she won, what would happen? If she got Bones really annoyed, he could take away all of the privileges she was enjoying. Making an enemy of her only captor at Hogwarts who would fight for rights was stupid. Then again, hitting Bones with several strong hexes was highly appealing.

"Magic time!" Sirius exclaimed dramatically, placing a Sonorous Charm on himself as he approached the commentator's table.

Bones undid the charm on himself, stood up and walked to the center of the field, rolling his shoulders and stretching his neck. "Give me a few minutes to stretch," he called to Sirius.

As James and Lily flew to centerfield, Sirius said, "All right, so here's how it's going down. James is going to get his butt kicked by Edgar first, then Lily and then those two'll duke it out. You ready Edgar?"

Bones nodded and drew his wand. James followed suit, straightening his back and taking a deep breath. Lily flew lazily to the side of the pitch next to Sirius and erected a strong blue shield around the two of them. "Thanks Lily," Sirius said, "Now stand ten steps apart...all right, now bow. Good. On the count of three, fire. The first person unable to retaliate is the loser. One, two... two and a half...three!"

James immediately sent out an Expelliarmus, which collided and deflected Bones's Jelly-Legs Curse. A weak silencing charm hit James next, leaving him unable to cast verbal spells, though he managed a smooth 'levicorpus' on Bones. However, the spell broke and sent Bones tumbling to the ground when the Auror sent a hazy blue cloud to encircle James and obscure his view.

Bones cast a quick immobilizing spell on James before clearing away the smoke, making it impossible for him to return spellfire. "And Professor Bones wins, much to everyone's surprise. Now James gets to be beat up by Lily! This is so funny," Sirius commented, laughing to himself.

James cracked his knuckles, readjusted his grip on his wand and said, "Don't go easy on me," he said seriously. "But could we set just one rule?" he asked sheepishly. At Lily's nod, he continued, "No Stunning spells."

Lily rolled her eyes. "No worries. I have plenty of other ways to beat you."

"I'm not going to let you win," he warned, as he moved ten steps from her.

"Now bow," urged Sirius from under the shield Bones had raised. Lily gave a slight nod in response to James's flourish. She readied her wand and waited for Sirius's signal. "One, THREE!" the dog Animagus exclaimed.

Lily immediately sent out an immobilizing spell, though it was blocked by James's shield, but the shield shattered under the impact, leaving the boy open to her next spell, which knocked him back several feet.

Lily politely waited for him to regain his feet before hitting him with the same spell again. Lily saw in James's mind that he was planning a 'levicorpus', so she summoned his wand to her quickly.

"And another surprising win!" Sirius exclaimed, voice thick with barely disguised hilarity. "Now, the duel we've been waiting for. In one corner we have Lily Evans, a strong, silent kind of girl with power and attitude. In the other is Auror Edgar Bones, a fun guy with a lot of training and power. Ten steps... Now bow..." Lily met Bones's bow evenly in depth. "One, two... three!"

Lily began with a harmless Expelliarmus and Protego combination, which was met with the standard Hand-Binding and Mummifying hexes. There was a steady exchange of by-the-book fighting, with none of Lily's spells reaching a level that could actually harm Bones.

Then Bones, for some reason, was unable to deflect a rebounded spell which sent him tumbling backwards. He got up shaking, weakened greatly. Lily knew that another spell of any sort would knock him out of the competition.

"Petricus Totalus," he panted.

Lily sent out the weakest shield she could manage, which was shattered by the spell. The girl found herself looking up at the sky, unable to move. Once Sirius announced that Bones had won, he undid the spell on her. She refused the hand he offered her and stood on her own. Looking up at the scoreboard, she said loudly, "Looks like Sirius and I are tied for first. Maybe we should have a tie-breaker."

"A Care of Magical Creatures trivia game?" Sirius said weakly.

"I was thinking more of a duel to the death," Lily admitted. "But it really depends on the prize."

James answered from his vantage point beside Sirius. "Honeydukes bar and a trophy."

"That's worth a duel to the death," Bones remarked mock-seriously. "I mean, you can't just split something like that."

"True," Sirius said woefully. "Or," he said brightly, "we could just race to the prize. Human forms, but I get a head start this time."

"I suppose that could work," Lily said thoughtfully.

James jogged to the edge of the pitch and summoned a bar of chocolate from his dormitory before transfiguring a nearby patch of grass into a translucent green trophy. When both prizes were in place, Bones made Sirius and Lily stand side by side.

"Now, when I say 'go', you—" Bones was cut off by Sirius's tearing forward. "Hey!" Bones said.

"You said go!" Sirius called over his shoulder.

Lily waited a moment or two, then leapt forward, sneakers pounding into the grass as she sprinted forward, sneakers pounding into the grass as she sprinted towards Sirius. Which Sirius was only feet from the cup and candy, Lily put on more speed to pass him and snatch up the prizes. She turned triumphantly to the panting boy, hugging the prizes to her chest.

"Better than a duel to the death," Sirius said, shrugging.

Lily tossed him the chocolate, grinning. "I still haven't finished all the fudge Remus gave me from Christmas," she admitted.

"Cool," Sirius said, pocketing the candy bar. "I still got second place. And James got last."

"Well, I had fun anyways," James said as they walked back to the center of the pitch where Bones stood. "As long as Padfoot didn't first, I don't care," he laughed, which earned him a punch in the arm from the aforementioned boy.

"Hey Lily," bones said as they neared. "Mind taking down the wards so we can go? We can still make lunch, if we hurry."

Lily waved her wand a few times, chanting softly to herself. Once the last ward was down, she nodded to Bones.

"Race you to the dorm!" Sirius challenged James, jumping onto his broom.

"You're on," James replied, zipping off, with Sirius close behind.

Lily picked up her own broom, ignoring Bones now that the boys had gone.

"I know you let me win," Bones said casually.

Lily paused, tempted to leave instead of answering, then she turned to him. "Why would I let you win?"

"You tell me. That was one of the weakest spells I've used in years," Bones said in that infuriating way he had.

"Does it really matter? You've proven you can beat me plenty of times," she said, sighing faintly. When she tried to stay on his good side it had the same effect as when she tried to kill him.

"Call it my competitive nature. Or curiosity. But if you seriously think of it, I've never beat you in a fair fight. First were Dumbledore and Moody, then it took five of us later. Then I talked you out of hurting Sara. Then I snuck up on you in America... am I missing any?"

Lily shrugged. What was he playing at? Seeing that he wasn't going to be quiet soon, Lily erected a few nonverbal privacy wards on the stadium.

"Well, if you know the only way I've beat you before was by chance or, to quote you, because you were emotionally unstable, why let me win?" Bones asked bluntly.

“Are we going to go through this every time I do something you don’t understand?” she asked, annoyed.

“Yes. So...”

“Fine, I let you win. It seemed like a good idea at the time,” she said vaguely.

“Because...”

“Since you’ve never been in a captive situation before, I’m going to spell it out for you. Sometimes it’s beneficial to have someone who doesn’t hate you around to protect you,” Lily said tensely.

“What does that have to do with letting me win?” he asked. His face suddenly cleared, then his brow furrowed. “Oh. You thought I’d... Listen, I want a rematch. Do your worst.”

“You’re on my side because you think I’m harmless,” Lily said, sticking with original topic, refusing to draw her wand.

“Not harmless. Just not dangerous.” Seeing her unimpressed look, he said, “You’re like... a hippogriff. No, like a wand. It’s not the wand itself that’s dangerous—it’s the spells you force it to produce. That was a general ‘you’, by the way,” he added. “Please. Try to beat me as quickly as you can. Anything goes.” Lily waited for him to ban Unforgivables, but he seemed to be done.

“Fine,” Lily agreed reluctantly. She set down her broom and trophy before pulling out her wand. They moved ten paces away and bowed.

“One, two, three!” Bones said. “Protego!” he said immediately afterwards. However, Lily’s Stunning spell ripped through his shield and Bones was unconscious on the grass. Lily awakened him almost instantly, waiting calmly for him to get up and run to Dumbledore.

To her surprise, he simply stood up and said, “See? I knew that would happen.”

“Then what was the point?” Lily asked as calmly as she could.

“Oh, she did, of course. But she went easy on them. She’s coming along nicely. Were you able to get Alastor to guard the south entrance to the village?” Edgar asked.

“Yes. Kingsley had to work today, but Emmeline volunteered to take his area,” Dumbledore told him.

“Hogsmeade has more security than Gringotts today,” Edgar chuckled, spooning some potatoes onto his plate to accompany his chicken. He looked up when James, Sirius and Lily entered the Great Hall.

“Ah, Mister Potter, Mister Black and Miss Evans,” Dumbledore greeted, voice as cheerful as if he had not asked Bones to watch over Lily not hours ago, “would you like to join us up here for lunch?”

The Auror was surprised when the three students came without question, though he supposed he should have known that no student would reject a direct invitation from the Headmaster. Sirius sat down on Dumbledore’s other side while James sat by Edgar, with Lily at his side.

“I’ve always loved Valentine’s Day,” Dumbledore said before taking a bite from a heart-shaped egg salad sandwich. “We let the house-elves fix whatever they’d like for the occasion and to experiment with new ideas.”

“With mixed results,” Edgar said, pointing out an untouched bowl of red green beans.

“Hey, Sirius, I dare you try those,” James challenged with a grin.

“Sure,” Sirius said easily. “Look good.”

Edgar looked down and saw Lily slowly shredding a pink roll. He was about to turn back to Dumbledore when he saw James set a sandwich and a handful of chips onto her plate. The girl rolled her eyes but began eating the food anyway.

The poor boy had liked her for such a long time, from what Edgar could tell. He turned back to talk with Dumbledore with a smile on his lips. Maybe Lily was finally softening to James.

[illegible]

Please review!

On Monday night after Lily finished her nightly exercises, she stood in the center of the pitch and called, “Are you going to watch me every night?” When no one replied, she sighed. “I know you’re there.”

James appeared on one of the middle benches, looking sheepish. "If you're going to be outside every night, then yes," he answered her.

“Then you won’t be getting much sleep,” Lily warned. “I have no where else to practice.”

James met on the field, looking thoughtful. “Actually,” he said slowly. “I may just know of a place.”

[illegible]

“The elves call it the Room of Requirement,” James said, lazily hitting one of the punching bags that hung at random intervals on the ceiling. “Just walk outside three times and think about you want. It’ll be great for training.”

Lily looked around. "Is this as big as it gets?" she asked.

“Oh, no,” James said proudly. “It can get way bigger. Just think about how big you want it.” The room expanded almost instantly, stretching out so far that James could barely make out the walls. It shrunk back down to its original size when he continued, “And because this room is so rarely here, we left it off of our map, so you’ll be hidden from us.”

“Including you?” she asked unbelievably.

“When you are in this room, I won’t watch and or bother you,” the boy promised, grinning. “Marauder’s word.”

“Because I can trust that,” Lily muttered, joking. She wandered over to look at the bookshelf lined with texts ranging from *Defense Against the Dark Arts* books to the *In-Depth Dark Magic Encyclopedia*.

James watched her, and then took a deep breath. "So..." James began nervously, "since we're already breaking curfew, why don't we just stay in here and... have a butterbeer or something."

Lily paused. "I'm not tired," she admitted to James's delight.

He smiled and the room shifted into a dark red room with a crackling fire reminiscent of the one in the Gryffindor Common Room. There were two separate dark brown armchairs with large footrests and there was a small glass table between them fitted with two chilled mugs of butterbeer.

They sat down in comfortable silence, both calmly sipping their butterbeers. It was calming and peaceful, especially since they were both tired. James noticed Lily's hand had strayed from its constant place beside her wand to rest on the arm of her leather chair.

"Anything you want in particular for your birthday?" James asked, breaking the silence.

"Nothing," she replied.

"Well, you've got to tell me something. Otherwise I might get you another thing you don't like," James said tensely.

"Another?" she asked, drawing the necklace he had bought her for Christmas from the front of her robes. "Please don't worry about it."

James ran through a mental list of possible presents he could get her, a smile on his face. She was wearing his present! "Fine," he said in a mock-offended tone. He found his gaze searching her face—those eyes, so recently open to him, and those dark lips...

His gaze snapped back to her eyes and he found her staring back at him intensely. There was a breathless moment, or maybe it was a day, when all he could see were her emerald eyes.

The spell was broken by her breaking his gaze to pick up her mug and . "I was in America," she said suddenly.

James watched her closely. She was gazing straight at the flames, jaw slightly clenched. “Those two weeks?” he clarified, completely fascinated by her. She was so complex, and so amazing.

“Yes. I was in London for a few days—got a cobra—then swam over. I thought they’d leave me alone, that they’d realize I wasn’t as important as they thought.” She gave tiny scoff. “Didn’t happen obviously.”

“You swam to America,” James repeated. “With a cobra? That,” he proclaimed, “has got to be the coolest thing I’ve ever heard.”

She laughed, calmer once she got out her story without him judging her, and leaned back in her chair. “The cobra, Onyx, was harmless. Well, he bit Bones, but he deserved it.”

“Where is he?” James asked, peering at her, half-expecting to see it in her lap.

“Zoo,” she said shortly. “Just because he might be dangerous.”

“I’m sorry,” James said sincerely. There was a tone in her voice when she talked of the snake that he had rarely heard her use.

She paused. “Thanks,” she said in the blank tone that indicated she was uncomfortable.

“Worried about the NEWTs?” he changed the subject casually.

“Honestly?” she said, “no. They don’t seem too important.”

“It’s getting late,” James said after they had sat in silence for a few minutes. “You ready to head up?”

She nodded and they headed out of the door, which vanished behind them. They walked in companionable silence to their Common Room, making sure not wake any portrait.

“Aulophobia,” James muttered to the Fat Lady. Without even opening her eyes, she grumbled and swung open to reveal the entrance hole. James allowed Lily to enter first, then followed.

At their parting, they paused. Their eyes met again, blocking out the rest of the world. “Thanks,” Lily said softly.

“No problem. The room is all yours,” James said.

"Not just that," she explained. "Just... everything. Goodnight, James."

“Night, Lily,” James said, watching her go up the stairs. He gave a content sigh and headed up to his own dorm.

[illegible]

The next afternoon, Lily went down to the groundskeeper's cabin to retrieve Shade's food for the day. She paused before grabbing the crate when she heard muffled voice inside the cabin.

She morphed her ears and listened in. "...in the Order a few weeks, but I need a favor... your first real assignment. We need to make an alliance with the centaurs. I know you are already on good terms, so if you'd...." Bones was saying.

“Course,” Hagrid replied.

"And once we have this tribe, we can ask them to contact another one. Thank you," Bones concluded. Hearing his footsteps approaching the door she was beside, Lily disillusioned herself and set the box where it had been.

Bones opened the door and almost tripped over the crate of flowers, meats and other foods. “What’s this?” he asked curiously, looking back at Hagrid.

“Jus’ some food fer this... animal in the forest,” Hagrid said ambiguously.

“Nothing dangerous, I hope,” Bones said, looking concerned.

“Oh no, it’s jus’... some people migh’ be a bi’ skered. Ministry’d prob’ly take ‘er away to experiment. She’s an accidental crossbreed—rejected by bo’ sides,” Hagrid explained, a tone of worry in his voice.

“It’s good of you to take care of it,” Bones said.

“Well, I’ve got some help,” Hagrid admitted. Lily, standing unseen feet from the Auror, silently urged Hagrid not to mention her fake name.

“A student? Well, if you’re sure it’s safe, then I think it’s good for them to learn to take care of animals,” Bones said. “See you in the morning, Hagrid.” He gave a small wave and left.

Once Bones was out of sight and Hagrid had gone back into his cabin, Lily revealed herself and picked up the crate. She waited a few seconds, then knocked on Hagrid’s door. “Edgar?” he called.

“It’s Aria,” Lily told him, holding the heavy crate loosely in her left hand. He let her into the cabin, putting on a kettle of tea and a plate of his rock cookies on the table. “I came to tell you about Shade’s progress.”

“How’s she doin’? I couldn’ get down ter see her this wekk,” Hagrid said guiltily. “Which does she prefer—meat or flowers?”

“She’ll only take a bite or two out of everything I give her,” Lily said in a detached way. Inside, however, she was worried. What if the mix of genes prevented the foal from eating anything?

“Maybe we should try somethin’ else,” Hagrid said pensively. He grabbed a handful of rock cakes from the table and put them into the crate, then searched his cabinets for other foods. “Termorrow I’ll get the ‘ouse-elves ter make some other stuff ter try ouy,” he said, placing a handful of apples into the crate along with a few dried beetles.

"We should try some cooked meat or vegetables," Lily suggested.
"Grass or hay, even."

"Tha's a good idea. Oh, 'ello Edgar," Hagrid said, looking past Lily to the door.

"I forgot to tell..." Bones trailed off.

"Oh, this is the one who's been 'elping me wit the half-breed," Hagrid explained. "We were jus' discussin' food ideas."

Lily turned to face the Auror. "Hello professor," she said flatly.

"Hello. So, Hagrid, when did you get Miss Evans to assist you with this?" Bones asked, walking further into the cabin.

"Oh, this is Aria Smith, not..." he paused, glancing over at Lily. "Blimey," he said softly, in his usual way of leaving his emotions in plain view. "Lily Evans?"

"Does everyone know who I am?" Lily asked Bones conversationally. "Some announcement I missed?"

"Just the Order members here," Bones assured her. "But why'd you give a fake name if you thought he hadn't heard of you?"

"In case you stopped by like this," Lily said dully. "I guess I'll be going back up to the castle," she said with a forced smile to Hagrid and stood up.

"That might be best," Bones said, looking over at Hagrid.

"Now wait jus' a mo'. She wasn't doin' no harm," Hagrid protested angrily. "A right good 'elp she's been. It'd be a shame ter see 'er go."

"She's not supposed to be outside alone, especially not in the forest," Bones explained reluctantly.

"From what ye've told me, she can handle 'erself. It's still on school grounds," Hagrid argued. "Closer ter the school than the border, in fact."

Bones stood silently for a moment, looking between Hagrid and Lily. "Don't go any farther than the creature," she said finally.

Hagrid's face broke into a huge smile. "Thanks."

"Just... don't tell Dumbledore," Bones said uncomfortably.

Hagrid nodded after a second. "Though I don't think e'd stop 'er," he said quickly, much too optimistically for Lily's taste.

Bones nodded to Lily, then waved to Hagrid. "I'll just talk to you later," he said before exiting.

"The Stunner, eh?" Hagrid said, pouring tea into two huge mugs. "Funny. I always imagined the Stunner would be..."

"Meaner?" Lily offered.

"Taller. Lily, I got nothin' against ye, I know what it's like to be judged ffer somethin'." He leaned in across the table, making the aged creak. "Me mum's a giant," he confided, as though Lily had been unable to tell. "Everyone thinks I've got some, I dunno, taint on me."

"I understand," Lily said when she realized he was waiting for a response. "

But my situation's a bit different."

"Well, yeah," Hagrid said, "but yer still a good person bein' judged for someat that weren't yer fault."

Lily didn't say anything for a minute, drinking the roasting hot slowly. "One reason that Bones didn't want me here," Lily said carefully, "is that he knows that I'm dangerous, if provoked. He likes having me in a place where he can watch after me, like in school."

“Now, the signal. Why did He tell us to blend in, to not react? Does he not want us to be open about our loyalty?” she exclaimed angrily.

“Keep your voice down. We can’t trust every Slytherin,” Severus pointed out coldly.

Narcissa spoke up. “Well, I think that any Slytherin who’s not on our side is a weak blood-traitor,” she drawled.

“Exactly,” Bellatrix agreed. “I say we slip Veritaserum into their drinks to figure out who’s on our side.”

“Excellent idea,” Rudolphus said supportively.

“Except Veritaserum is both expensive and illegal. Plus, it’s so indiscreet the whole school would know what happened.”

“Imperius?” Narcissa suggested.

“More illegal and more obvious,” Severus said, rejecting the idea swiftly.

“Fine,” Bellatrix muttered. “What do you suggest then, Severus. Asking politely?”

“There’s no need for us to know,” Severus replied calmly. “Students can’t hurt us. We should just be wary of everyone, in case there’s a snitch in our House.” However, Severus made a mental note to tell Dumbledore to be on the lookout for any Imperius-like actions anyways.

“I guess you’re right,” Narcissa sighed. “I just wish there was a way to know.”

“So does everyone else, Cissy,” Bellatrix snapped, glowering at her sister.

Severus made the decision for the group, hoping they would listen.
“We just need to keep our ears open and our mouths closed about everything, including the Stunner.”

Lily’s birthday party is next chapter!!! Please review!

The entire day on Thursday Lily waited from Sirius, Tonks, James and Remus to corner her with presents. But all she got was a simple “Happy birthday” at breakfast and a candle in her pancakes, compliments of Sirius.

She was glad, in a way, she decided. It meant no worrying about being overheard. No getting too attached. But deep down, she had been expecting something. A birthday present, a real one. Voldemort had given her things for the past two years (a dagger and a wand holster), but she wanted something that would take her mind off death.

She went up to her room after her classes were over and looked around for the fudge Remus had gotten her for Christmas. Lily found it in a big box that was under her bed, which much have been set their by the Order at some point.

She pulled out a slice of Peace Peppermint and chewed on it for awhile. She calmly moved her dress robes from Sirius aside and caught a glimpse of the diary Severus had giver her. Pensively, she pulled it out and set her thumb on the cover indent. It opened to reveal blank pages inviting her to pour out her thoughts. She paused, then took the diary over to her desk, dipped her quill in her inkpot and began writing.

“Who should go get her?” Bones asked, leaning back in his chair. His entire classroom had been transformed into a party environment—bright red and gold streamers hung from the rafter and there were plush chairs surrounding the one big table. The guests, consisting of Remus, James, Sirius, Tonks, Hagrid and Edgar, sat around the table, looking at the clock. The Marauders had chosen to leave Peter out because they had not yet told him about Lily, and weren’t going to until she agreed.

In the center of the table was an odd assortment of presents along with an elaborately decorated cake ordered from the kitchens.

“I’ll go,” James volunteered immediately.

“It’s a surprise party,” Remus reasoned. “You’d give it away.”

“Would not,” James argued sulkily.

“I’ll go and pretend I’m getting her for dinner in the Great Hall,” Tonks offered, grinning widely. “Oh, I’m so excited!” Her hair flashed from blue to hot pink.

“That’s a good idea. Tonks, you go,” Bones decided.

Once Tonks had hurried from the room, Sirius leaned farther back in his chair and propped up his feet. “So, how is she going to explain their sudden detour to the Defense classroom?” he asked, grinning.

“Oh no! I left my Potions book in Bones’s room!” Tonks exclaimed halfway down the stairs.

Lily raised an eyebrow. “You left your Potions book in the Defense classroom?” she asked, suspicious.

“Well, yeah,” Tonks blustered, the lie obvious in her eyes. “I was working on my homework for Slughorn while bones wasn’t looking. He’s pretty lax about that kind of thing.”

“Really? Maybe I should try it sometime,” Lily said casually.

“Yeah, but I didn’t finish my homework, so I really need that book,” Tonks continued, getting back on the original subject.

With a small smirk, Lily said, “Oh, all right. I’ll see you at dinner then.”

“No! I mean, you can’t because I’m afraid to go in there alone. What if her catches me?” Tonks whined. “I might get detention.”

“For getting your Potions book?” Lily asked for clarification (and her own amusement.)

“He’s strict about students working on stuff for other classes in his room,” she said knowingly.

“I thought he was lax about—”

“Well, he’s lax sometimes. But today he seemed in a really sour mood. Come with me?” she pleaded.

Lily paused dramatically. “I guess so,” she finally conceded.

Tonks grinned widely and beckoned Lily to the hallway leading to the classroom. Lily followed, though the scene reminded her too much of a time when Severus led her to a room with a surprise inside.

“Would you like to go in first?” Tonks asked loudly, gesturing to the door.

Lily, deciding to cooperate, said, “Yes, thank you,” and opened the door.

“Happy birthday!” exclaimed several voices as candles flared up to reveal a revamped Defense classroom.

Lily looked around at her two teachers and the Marauders, smiling softly. “Thank you all so much!” she said as enthusiastically as she could.

“My idea,” James said casually, puffing out his chest.

“We got some cakes and presents—oh, and some real food snacks to make up for missing dinner,” Bones said, gesturing to the table. “What first?”

“Food,” Sirius voted, popping a small quiche into his mouth.

“Seconded,” Tonks said, passing Lily to enter the room.

“Movement passed,” Lily said. She took the only empty seat, situated between James and Tonks and facing the others there. The girl selected a few spinach quiches to eat, along with a cucumber sandwich and a goblet of pumpkin juice.

“This is good,” Tonks noted, eating with gusto. “My compliments to the house-elves, as usual.”

“They were delighted to help out,” Bones said after clearing his throat with a sip of juice. “Went all out with cake, as you can see,”

Lily inspected the three-tier cake- it was very unique, one half chocolate and other white all covered with green and yellow designs.

“I hope it didn’t take them too long,” Lily said, recalling how friendly the elves had been when she had last visited the kitchen.

“Been working on it since last Friday,” Bones said calmly.

“Really?” asked Tonks, amazed.

“No. They started this morning,” Bones said, grinning.

Once everyone had finished their snacks, the candles on the cake glowed bright and the rest of the lights dimmed. The darker candlelight cast oddly exciting shadows on everyone’s faces. The last time she had been in this scene, preparing to blow out candles, the surrounding faces had been those of Petunia, her parents, a few friends whose names she could no longer remember and Robin.

“Happy birthday to you,” Sirius began boisterously. The rest of the table joined his off-key singing enthusiastically. When they finished, Lily closed her eyes. Now she was supposed to wish. The first thing that came to her mind was freedom. But was it really better to be free in hiding than captive with friends and parties?

Then her thoughts drifted towards her one friend not present. I wish Severus could be free, she decided, then took a huge breath and blew out all the canles.

In the following applause, Lily closed her eyes again. What was the point in wishing? It only led to disappointments.

Bones quickly divvied out the cake, giving Hagrid the entire top tier. “This is delicious,” Tonks moaned, taking her first bite. The rest of the table voiced similar sentiments, other than Sirius, who’s mouth was so full he could only grunt.

“Sirius,” Remus admonished, rolling his eyes.

“You’re not my mother,” Sirius said once he had swallowed. “Good thing too,” he said as an afterthought. “She’s an overpowering, attention-seeking perfectionist. You’re... oh, wait, maybe you are my mother.”

Remus gave him an offended look. “Oh really?” he said, miffed.

“Well, there’re a few differences,” Sirius contemplated. “I just can’t think of any of them. James?”

“Remus is a guy,” the other boy pointed out solemnly.

“That was it,” Sirius agreed.

Lily laughed along with the rest of the guests, feeling rather at ease. Her left hand, however, remained within easy reaching distance of her wand, which was situated inside her right sleeve. Easy conversation spread along the small table as they ate.

“...but the centaurs kept bathin’ in the back areas of the lake, so one day the merpeople decided it were time ter put an end ter all that,” Hagrid was telling a fascinated Tonks.

“...and then we decided that magenta would be even funnier than orange, so we went with that,” Sirius was telling an amused Bones.

“...hanging by his toes! The whole crowd was screaming,” James was reminiscing to Lily and Remus. “He was able to throw the Quaffle to McKinnon, but, you know Jones—no core strength. WE had to go help him up before he fell. You’ve got to come to the last game,” he reminded Lily.

“I’ll be there,” she promised again.

“Good. Then there was this one time....”

Once everyone had finished eating, Bones spoke up. "Ready for presents now?"

Lily nodded once, unsure how to act.

"Mine first!" Sirius exclaimed, sliding a box to her with his wand.

Lily carefully slit the starry paper and opened the box. Inside a pair of sleek black running shoes gleamed. "The bottoms of your old ones are worn out," he said, winking. "Got to have friction. But I blatantly refuse to race you again."

"That's fair," she said, closing the box.

"Wait! There's more," Sirius said. "Look under the shoes," he urged.

Lily opened the box and found one pair of purple and pink striped socks and one pair that were neon red with little gold lions running on them. "Adds a bit of color to your wardrobe—secretly. This way no one can see it."

"We had a rough time talking him out of lingerie," Remus said, shaking his head. "Open mine next," he offered. Lily opened his box to find he had gotten her a tiny replica of Hogwarts that, when tapped with a wand, lit up and miniscule figures could be seen inside. "Because we're graduating soon," he explained.

Next Hagrid presented her with a shiny white bridle with a wink and a small sharp tooth. "From a little blue dragon. Wha' a cutie. Nearly caught me on fire when I got this out though, lil' blighter."

Tonks gave her a bottle of nail polish guaranteed to change color every day. "I saw yours was chipping," she explained, gesturing to Lily's nails, which still had the faint remnants of her manicure from her escape weeks ago.

"Mine now," James said, grinning. He pushed a small box towards her. Gingerly unwrapping it, she found a small, yet ornate, silver anklet. "Like it?" Receiving her affirmation, he added, "Once you put it

on, it becoming invisible to everyone but you. You just have to renew the spell every year or two.”

Lily bent down and attached it to her ankle, smiling. “It’s beautiful,” she said.

“And lastly, from me,” Bones said, sliding a small box towards her. Lily opened it to reveal a silver key. Lily examined it curiously for a minute, then back up at Bones.

“Go to my office,” he instructed, gesturing towards it. “Sitting in the middle of my desk will be another box. That key opens it.”

Lily nodded and stood up. “Do you know what it is?” she asked the other guests.

“Nope,” Sirius admitted.

“You’ve got to show us though,” Tonks said. “Oh, now I’m excited!” Her pink hair turned orange. “Go on.”

“Lily?” Bones said before she could start towards his office. “First, I need you to swear not to abuse this present. I had to get special permission. Don’t make me regret it.”

“I swear,” Lily said. Now she was really curious, but contained, walking casually to his office, ducking several red and gold streamers on the way.

Inside Bones’s office it was eerily silent compared to the noise of conversation outside. There was a variety of Dark detectors, all of which began twirling noiselessly when she entered. She hurriedly went to the large box in the center of the wooden desk and inserted the key into the lock.

A streak of black launched itself at her, and Lily dodged it quickly. It landed on the floor, coiling up for another attack. “Onyx?” Lily asked incredulously.

The snake froze. "Aria?" he hissed, sounding wary. His tongue flickered out and, realizing it was her, darted forward and began wrapping his way up her leg. "Aria! I know you wouldn't leave me in that place!"

Lily offered her arm for the cobra to climb up and he wrapped himself in his familiar position around her neck. "I missed you," she admitted.

"Welcome back, brother," said the Mark, sounding sincere, though Lily had learned not to trust it.

"They took me away from you," Onyx told her. "After I bit that man. The people at the place put me on one of those cold tables and messed with my stitches. Then I was in a small room with people staring at me all the time. It—"

"Lily?" called Bones from the classroom. "Are you all right?" There was a faint tone of worry in his voice.

"Yes," she called back to him. "But did they treat you right at the place?" she asked Onyx.

"I got mice," Onyx admitted reluctantly. "But I missed you and I'm glad to be back, sister." He tightened his grip protectively around her shoulders.

"What did you get?" Sirius called impatiently.

"I know you don't like people staring at you, but you might have to get used to it if you want to stay with me. I can make you invisible most of the time, but the people out there want to meet you," Lily explained to Onyx.

"As long as I get to stay with you," Onyx said, raising his head to meet her eyes.

The party guests turned to at her as she entered the room again. They looked confused, except Bones. "Well?" prompted Sirius, not noticing the addition to her black robes. "Are you going to show us?"

Remus noticed first. "Is that...?" he trailed off, eyes wide.

"It's around her neck," hinted Bones, using a spell to enhance the glow of the candlelight in the room.

Having looked to the source of the voice, Onyx suddenly puffed up and twisted his upper body into striking stance. "It's him!" Onyx hissed to Lily. "I'll show him to take you away—he obviously didn't learn the first time."

"Onyx, calm down," Lily soothed. "He's the one who brought you back to me." The entire table was locked on the cobra now. "He did chase after me, but if it weren't for him you'd still be in the place and I... I dunno where I'd be."

Onyx relaxed his position obediently, but he glared at the Auror. "I don't like him," Onyx spat.

"I don't really either," Lily admitted. "This," she said to the table. "is Onyx. He's a good friend."

"Only you," Sirius said, shaking his head.

"Are we, er, safe?" Tonks asked uncertainly, hair blending into her chair.

"Of course," Lily said soothingly. "Anyone knocks me out, make them bleed. Other than that, no biting," Lily instructed Onyx.

"Wish I was a Parselmout'," Hagrid sighed, eyeing Onyx wistfully.

"Dumbledore said you can take it to class with you if there's an Invisibility Charm on it," Bones told her. "One incident and it goes back though," he warned.

"Thank you for the presents," Lily addressed the table, not bothering to reply to Bones.

"That was fun," Tonks said, stretching as she stood up.

“What a great week,” Sirius said. “I’m glad we got assigned to guard you, Lils.”

The blood fled from Lily's face and she froze. Had that been the only reason they had been handing out with her? Tonks, Sirius, Remus? Even James?

James seemed to notice something was wrong, for he was watching her, confused. Then his head snapped to Sirius. “Lily—”

Lily turned on her heel and was out of the Defense classroom so quickly no one had time to protest. Emotion clawed up inside her. The freedoms she'd been enjoying, the fun—they'd just been an extension of her prison. The Marauders were simply more guards in disguise. And she'd thought they actually liked her. She had thought James...

Suddenly she could not stand herself and her idiocy and she started running. The halls were empty since the students were all still at dinner, so she was able to run freely. Onyx was silent around her neck, used to such outbreaks from her.

Going outside to her spot by the lake was out of the question—they'd all know where she was. She ran to a place that could stop anyone from coming in. A big place. Water. So no one who only hung out with me to watch over the Stunner can't get in. A quiet place, Lily thought, darting back and forth in front of the empty patch of wall.

She entered the new room, closing the door sharply behind her. Lily looked around, taking a deep breath. “A perfect place to not think,” she commented to Onyx.

[illegible]

James, despite having darted after Lily the moment she had left, had quickly lost sight of her. “Damn,” he said, frustrated. He closed his eyes for a minute, trying to figure out where she could have gone.

“Lily,” he said stubbornly, “there has been so much in my life I haven’t been sure about. But my feelings for you are not one of them.”

Lily looked up at him, at a loss for words. She wanted to believe him, and yet she didn’t. If life had been complicated before... Here was a person who loved her despite everything she had done, and, she realized suddenly, she loved him back. But was it worth it? To love James, though she knew in heart she would have to return to Voldemort and, almost definitely, her death? She realized there was a tear rolling its way traitorously and slowly down her cheek.

James walked over and pulled her gently to her feet. He cupped her face in his hands and brushed the tear away with his thumb. He slowly lowered his lips to hers. The kiss lasted only a moment, but a moment was enough for Lily to know, as they left the room together, that she had finally found someone that she could, and would, love.

The last section is based off a chapter Aulophobic Clarinetist wrote for this story. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year to all of my reviewers!

Please give me feedback!

Sirius apologized the next morning at breakfast. "I didn't mean it like that. That hasn't been the reason since after the first week since Christmas," he swore. "You're our friend, Lily," he said. Remus nodded at his side. "Official Marauder girl. You're got the Animagus and everything."

James was sitting by her side, a little closer than he had been yesterday. "True," he agreed. "You hang out with us more than Peter anyways. Bloke's in the library every meal now."

"Sirius is telling the truth," Remus added. "We're not just using you, or keeping you prisoner. Please forgive us for that ever being the reason."

Lily nodded, more glad than she cared to admit to see the shining honesty in all of their eyes. "I'm guessing I'm still not allowed to bite them," Onyx said wryly, invisible around her shoulders.

"Right," Lily said. "They're my...friends. Not as good as you, of course," she assured "him."

"Good," Onyx said. "Is there anyone here I will be able to defend you against?" he asked, annoyed. "I want to help you out. Otherwise I'm just a scarf."

Lily had to admit the logic in that. "It would be nice if you could keep an eye on those people there," she said with a subtle gesture at the Slytherin table. "The dark-haired girl, the boys near her and the blonde. They're all against me."

"I can see why you left, with so many people who don't like you," Onyx said. He gave his head, only visible to Lily, a shake. "We should have stayed in America—no people. Not this many in one place at least."

"Not the place we went," Lily agreed. "But I... I don't know if staying in America would have been good."

Onyx paused, not answering, tongue flicking in and out slowly. “Is it because of him?” he asked, nodding towards James, who was talking to his newly redeemed friends.

Lily had to think it over before answering. “That’s part of it,” she admitted. “And there aren’t any windows that will hurt you here.”

“True, sister, but also no sports cars,” Onyx said stubbornly.

“I’ll have to take you on a broom ride sometime,” Lily said. “You’ll like it better than cars.”

“Hey, Lily,” James said, turning to her. “I was wondering if you wanted to go down to the kitchens for dinner tonight,” he offered, looking slightly nervous.

Lily knew that it was more than just a friendly offer, so she paused before answering. “That’d be nice,” she said carefully.

“Awesome,” James said, breaking into a relieved grin. “I just wanted to know so I could talk to the house-elves.”

“Don’t cause any trouble for them. They already went out of their way for the party last night,” Lily told him.

“They love to cook, as long as you’re nice to them,” James assured her. “My house-elf, Bic, loves when we eat extra food at home,” he mentioned. “I love house-elves.”

“Well, then, I’m looking forward to it,” Lily said.

“What now” Onyx asked, watching James jealously. “I don’t see why you need me,” he said huffily. “You’ve got James Potter now.”

“Onyx,” Lily protested. “You know I need you. I was so mad when they took you away—they had to put this bracelet on me to stop me from leaving here.”

“Leaving here. Not finding me. Would you ever have come and looked for me?” he asked, slumping dejectedly on her shoulders.

“Yes. First thing. How could I go on an adventure without you? You’re my familiar—we’re supposed to stick together,” she said decisively.

Onyx looked slightly mollified. "They'll never take me away from you again, not if I'm still alive," he promised, squeezing her shoulders.

Lily rose to go to her Potions class. "They'll regret trying," she vowed, eyes hard.

[illegible]

“Today we’re reviewing illegal potions,” Bones told the classroom. “There’s usually a question about names and effects of them on the Defense NEWT. We’re covering it in here because Potions only goes over what you’ll actually make in class. So, how does one detect when they’ve been given an illegal potion?” he asked the class.

Severus knew, of course, but would not answer. He sat with his normal group in the back of the class. Eyes narrowed, he remembered the time Bones slipped him Veritaserum. He should have noticed. He had just assumed—no, no more assuming the nobility of others. Everyone was an enemy.

“They fall over dead?” Black said, grinning and nudging his friends.

"I meant detection before consumption," Bones clarified, trying unsuccessfully to suppress a smile. "Mr. Lupin?"

“Smell,” the lycan answered. “Sometimes sight.”

“Excellent,” Bones said, writing the answer on his chalkboard in a messy, loopy handwriting. “Anyone else?” When no one answered, he looked around the room. “Miss Evans?”

"If they tell you," she replied blandly.

“Well, yes, but how often does that really happen?” Bones reasoned. Now it was Severus suppressing a smirk as he remembered giving

“Oh, well,” James blustered, “it didn’t work.” Still, he kept at least a foot behind her as they entered the kitchens.

Once the house-elves had seated them at a secluded table already set with a platter of thin toast and a steaming seafood dip. A house-elf appeared at Lily’s side to ask what else she wanted to order. “What do you have?”

“Whatever Miss would like,” the house-elf replied earnestly.

“I’d really appreciate if you made me some rice and chicken, flavor of choice,” Lily said.

The house-elf bowed and scurried away, directing surrounding elves to complete the order, which they delightedly set to. “Did you order earlier?” Lily asked James. As she spoke, she tapped her cobra with her wand and allowed it to slither down into her lap to make it less conspicuous.

James nodded. “So... Sirius already ate the chocolate from the Olympics,” he informed her.

“It’s been almost a week,” she reminded him.

“Well, he actually finished it within the hour he got it,” James admitted. “Conversation starter. Here, let me try another one. Um... what are your views on centaur land rights?”

Lily gave a bemused laugh. “Really, James?”

“Remus seems to find it fascinating... never shuts up about it, actually.” James gave a small shrug. Their conversation slipped into a more casual rhythm as Lily changed the subject when the food arrived.

They had only gotten into a conversation about vampires when the cobra suddenly darted up Lily and on to the table. Lily gave it an admonishing hiss, which James considered very brave since the cobra was easily as long as he was tall and had venomous fangs.

Rather than attacking Lily, as James feared, it slumped and slid back under the table. "Sorry," Lily said. "He wanted to be able to watch over me."

"Tell him you're safe with me," James replied.

"I did," she assured him.

"And...?"

"He didn't exactly believe me. But he decided that I can handle myself is, quote, 'a kitchen full of three foot tall chefs and a scrawny boy'. I'm sure no offense was intended," she said, eyes sparkling teasingly.

"Of course not," James allowed, smiling. When they had both finished eating and their conversation was dwindling off, James sat nervously, foot beating a nervous tattoo on the floor. Then he casually placed his hand on Lily's, and gave her a smile. "I'm glad you came down here with me," he said, trying to sound smooth and confident.

"I..." Lily broke off when the black snake darted back on top of the table. She began hissing, obviously annoyed at it. Onyx approached their touching hands and hissed warningly at James, exposing long fangs. James looked uncertainly at Lily. She seemed to be conversing with the snake, and he trusted that she didn't want it to bite him, but the snake looked rather miffed, hood open and all, so he slowly removed his hand.

Lily looked up at James sharply and, though her expression was controlled, James knew she was worried about his reaction. "I'm fine," he promised.

"He's normally not this..." Lily trailed off when the cobra said something to her. She gave a short reply, and looked back at James.

"He just wants to protect you," James said. "I understand—I do too."

"Neither of you are doing a very good job," Lily said wryly.

“Not through lack of trying,” James promised. There was a moment when neither of them spoke, eyes locked. Her eyes, once so blank, now burned with intensity.

A loud hiss broke off the silence. The black snake wrapped his way up Lily’s arm quickly, eyes on James. There was definite menace in its eyes.

James fiddled with his pumpkin juice, giving Lily time to talk with her serpentine companion. Approval of the best friend was very important to a relationship, or so Sirius told him. James wasn’t sure if the same rules applied when the friend wasn’t human. He looked Lily over now that she wasn’t paying attention to him; the dark circles under her eyes were fading, though still distinct against her fair skin. He hoped she wasn’t staying in the Room of Requirement too long—he didn’t want her health in danger.

“Onyx won’t be coming next time,” Lily announced tightly after a minute or so. Then she quickly added, “If there is a next time.”

“Well, I was hoping to make this a weekly thing, but if you’d rather…” he trailed off lamely, feeling idiotic.

A flash of relief overtook her face. “That’d be nice,” she said, a light smile flitting to her face. “Onyx will be safe in my dorm.”

James felt a bit guilty for getting Lily mad at the snake when he personally knew what that was like, but still relieved he wasn’t on the receiving end. “He really doesn’t like me, does he,” James sighed.

“It isn’t your fault,” Lily assured him, taking a quick sip of her drink. “He’s used to being my only friend. This will be an adjustment for him. Try not to take it personally—I know how you get when you think someone doesn’t like you.”

The Marauder gave a theatrical sniff, making Lily laugh. He gave her a grin and a wink as the house-elf returned, bearing a tray of various desserts. Lily took an éclair and James grabbed a piece of white cake covered in chocolate ice cream.

James took a bite of the moist cake, opening his mouth to accommodate the forkful. "Is is gud," he said around the dessert.

Lily snorted and shook her head. "Swallow, then speak," she advised. She took a deliberately miniscule bite of her éclair and chewed daintily.

"C'mon, Lils, dig in!" James encouraged, taking another huge bite.

The redhead hesitated, then picked up her dessert and took a huge bite of it, causing a sizeable dollop of chilled custard to fall to her robe front. As she chewed, she wiped it off with her napkin. She drank a gulp of juice to wash it down before saying, "Oops."

"No worries," James said, shoveling another bite into his mouth. "It 'akes shkill and time ter eat wout shpill—" He broke off as his most recent forkful plopped onto his lap. "Whoops," he said.

Lily laughed a full, happy laugh, and rolled her eyes. "Skill," she repeated, nodding seriously.

"Obviously something I don't have," James admitted good-naturedly. "At least in this department."

"In what then?" she teased. "Quidditch? Dueling?"

He stuck out his tongue in a very mature fashion before finishing off his dessert in one last bite. "Done," he proclaimed, throwing his hands up in victory.

Lily plopped the last bite of éclair into her mouth and nodded. "Me too." She tapped the cobra with her wand to make it invisible once more before standing up.

They walked back up to the Common Room immersed in friendly conversation. When they got to the bottom of the girls' staircase, they paused, neither one moving. Slowly, James leaned towards her lips, but a sharp hiss made him pull back, but he smiled at Lily to show that the cobra hadn't offended him. "Maybe next time," he said, winking. "Goodnight, Lily."

“Goodnight James,” she said before departing. As she walked up the stairs, James heard annoyed hissing in a familiar voice.

[illegible]

“She’ll eat cooked chicken,” Lily reported to Hagrid as she sipped some scalding tea. “And of the flowers, tiger lilies seem to be her favorite.”

"Tha's funny," Hagrid noted, sitting back in his chair. His wiry beard had been burned in several places, adding a bitter scent to the already smelly cabin. It had happened, according to Hagrid, when Sparkles had gotten a little spooked.

“Not really. Lilies represent death in many cultures,” Lily informed him. “I can’t think of anything we haven’t tried—chicken, beef, pork, duck, escargot...”

“Wha’ about pastries,” Hagrid asked, excited. Lily shook her head, not bothering to point out to the half-giant that neither half of Shade’s ancestors ate desserts. “A’ight, let’s get some pastries down thur fer her to try. I’ll ask fer ‘em tomorrow. Fer now, jes’ try the chicken legs... and I’ll throw in a rock cake again ter see if she’s changed her mind.”

Lily didn't admit that she had not actually made the filly try a rock cake yet. She wanted all its new grown teeth to stay intact. "I already got some chicken from the kitchens," Lily told him, showing him a greasy paper bag. She added the rock cakes to the bag before standing. "Oh, Lily, 'ow's Shade doin' with Onyx?" he asked, gesturing to the omnipresent cobra around her neck.

“Better than I had hoped,” Lily said honestly.

“Tha’s good. A’ight, see ya next time,” the large man said, waving goodbye.

Lily gave a small wave before exiting the cabin. Once she was in the woods, she said to Onyx, "I'll let you grab some mice or whatever else you can find while I work with Shade."

The cobra gave no answer, staring sulkily into the distance. His strong black coils were wrapped in a way that was formal and distant.

"You can't still be mad at me for last night," Lily said, annoyed. "He's not taking your place, I promise. He's just..." Lily didn't know how to describe James. The forest around them darkened as the branches overhead thickened and blocked the remaining sunlight.

"You said we'd never be apart again. Now he shows up and I can't even have dinner with you," Onyx complained.

"I just need some alone time with him. He'll try to keep me as safe as you do. Only once a week—I'm yours the rest of the time," Lily explained, desperate for him to understand. This wasn't how she imagined their first week back together would be. "You're my familiar, Onyx. No bond is deeper than that."

Onyx tightened his grip marginally. "It's so different here. Before it was just you and me against the world. Now there's us, that boy, his friends, the enemy and the big man."

"None of them are with now," she pointed out.

"Before when you didn't tell me about your past I didn't care. Now I'm the only one who doesn't know. Aria, sister, you—"

Lily broke in. "My name's not really Aria," she said as they emerged into Shade's clearing. "It's Lily."

Lily explained her story, about Robin, Voldemort, Bones and James as she combed out Shade, allowing her to eat the food she had brought. When she had finished brushing and story-telling, there were only the leaves of the lilies and the bones of the chicken legs left. As Lily banished the scraps, she realized that the rock cakes were gone too. Amused, she headed back up to the castle, answering Onyx's many questions on the way.

The Dark Lord Voldemort paced restlessly around his planning room, dark hair in disarray. Dumbledore had the castle so protected. There must be some day the wards were low. There had to be some way he could get her out. His Velisna.

He had to get her out.

The moment Lily entered the Defense classroom she knew something was off

The moment Lily entered the Defense classroom she knew something was off. The room was full of half un-packed boxes and there was a chalkboard in front of the classroom next to the desk. On the board were the words, 'Professor Augusta Longbottom.'

Lily and James exchanged a look and Sirius muttered, "Where do you think Bones is at?" Lily's sharp eyes took in the changes. A substitute teacher would not bother bringing her own supplies and photos, she decided. Bones was gone. Instead of the relief she expected, she only felt worry—what would happen to her already limited freedom without her main defender?

"Hello class," said a gaudily overdressed woman as she entered the room. "I'm your new Defense teacher, Professor Longbottom."

"Where's Bones?" Sirius asked loudly.

"He was just a temporary teacher until they could find me, now wasn't he?" Longbottom replied as though she found Sirius daft for asking.

Lily sat back in her chair, deciding how to react. She settled for a small, smug smile for the Slytherins' benefit. Let them come to their own conclusion about Bones's sudden disappearance.

"Wonder if it's Order related," James was muttering to Sirius while the new teacher called roll.

"Maybe," Sirius said thoughtfully. "Here!"

Lily leaned over. "Maybe he was about to get fired from his Auror position because he was gone so long and realized he'd best get back in the field," Lily muttered to them.

"Yeah, that could be it," James said, looking put out that the most likely story had no intrigue or mystery for him to solve.

“We will,” James promised, opening the portrait for Lily to step through.

They walked together back up to the Gryffindor Tower, talking easily about everything from Quidditch to the Groovy Hippogriffs which had just broken up (to Lily's roommates' horror). Lily found it so easy to talk with James—she found her Occlumency levels dropping when she was near him and she was laughing and smiling often.

He had such an honest air about him that it was difficult not to open up. There was always a joke ready if need be, but he also knew when to stay serious when Lily needed to talk.

When they reached the foot of the girls' stairs in the empty Common Room, they stood uncertainly for a moment.

“Second time’s the charm,” James said, taking a step closer to her, eyes locked hers.

"I thought the third time was," Lily remarked, heart beating faster as he neared.

“Who cares?” James muttered with a small laugh before his lips met hers. His hands found their way to her back and pulled her closer, deepening the kiss. “Night, darling,” he said, pulling away.

Lily gave him a smile. “Goodnight James.”

[illegible]

“The day you leave these grounds for Easter vacation, you will be given the Dark Mark,” Bellatrix told Peter bluntly in their section of the library. “Are you prepared to serve the master?”

"Y-yes," Peter stuttered.

“To reject your current friends and devote yourself completely?” she challenged, eyes dark and intense.

“Yes.” His friends didn’t even really like him anymore. He’d been replaced by James’s crush, even though he knew what she really was. He had tried to tell them she was the Stunner, that she was biding her time to return to Voldemort, but they always changed the subject. Well, he was through with that.

“Excellent,” Bellatrix drawled, a malicious grin overtaking her face. “Easter’s soon. You need to get prepared to serve.”

“What do I need to do?” Peter asked humbly.

“Learn the Unforgivables,” Bellatrix said, enjoying every syllable that rolled off her tongue. Peter gave a fearful shudder.

[illegible]

“How’s Lily doing?” Edgar asked the moment he could see Dumbledore’s office through the emerald flames.

Dumbledore looked up from his desk at the Auror. “No different than yesterday. You triple-checked her security—you know she’s still here.”

"I wasn't that worried she'd attempt a breakout, but..." Bones admitted. "No reaction to my leaving?" he continued.

“None that I could tell,” Dumbledore said calmly. “Maybe she’s realized the benefits of remaining here,” he suggested.

“Maybe...” Bones said before allowing Dumbledore to change the subject.

[illegible]

The parties were fun, of course. It was nice having friends. It was heaven having James. But she knew it couldn't last. Once the wards were lowered, once Voldemort came, she'd have to lock all of her

happy memories away to perform her job. She kicked the nearest punching bag so hard that it flew from its hook.

She could leave before the Dark Lord came... or die trying. But now one of the three factors holding her to her fate was gone. There was more of a chance to escape with just the Mark in direct contact with her. And if she could get it off... She clenched her teeth as her knuckles began to bleed after punching the bag so long, but continued hitting it.

She could find some way to leave now to avoid Voldemort, but she was torn. Would she rather escape now and have neither fear nor love again or would she rather stay here with James, spend an unknown amount of time with him, and then surrender herself over to the Dark Lord?

Indecisive, she continued beating the punching bag until the blood made it hard to make solid contact with the bag. She tapped each hand with her wand to repair them, and moved to the next clean punching bag.

[illegible]

“Excuse me, Professor Slughorn?” Lily stood before the overweight man after class. James hovered at the door, watching her conversation.

“Yes Miss Evans?” Slughorn replied easily, sorting through an array of potions flasks.

“May I have a pass to the Restricted Section of the library? I’ve begun studying some of the more complex potions in my free time, but most are in there. Would you mind?” she asked, holding out a piece of parchment.

“Not brewing anything illegal, are you?” he said, picking up a quill. “Just kidding, of course. I trust you, Miss Evans,” he said conspiratorially, signing the parchment with a flourish.

“Thank you, professor,” she said, nodding to him before meeting James at the exit. “Hey James,” she greeted, though they’d been partners only moments before.

“Does that mean we’re skipping lunch to go to the library?” James asked as they began walking up the stairs out of the depths of the dungeons.

“It means I’ll be going to the library, while you go to lunch. I’ll see you in Defense,” she said decidedly.

“No way. I’m coming with you,” James said stubbornly. “Here, let me get that,” he said, reaching for her backpack.

“I can carry it myself,” Lily replied, annoyed. “I could carry it and you.”

“I’m not questioning your ability,” James said calmly. “It’s politeness. You’re my girlfriend... right?” he said quickly. “I mean, if you just want to date, that’s fine with me too.”

“I’m your girlfriend,” Lily agreed. “And speaking of being a polite boyfriend, why don’t you go to lunch and get me something so I can eat during Defense?” Lily said slyly.

James finally caved. “I will,” he promised. “But I’m coming next time.”

“All right,” Lily said dismissively, turning to take the hallway towards the library.

“See you,” James called after her.

“Goodbye,” she replied. The library was empty when she walked in other than a pair of Ravenclaws in one corner and Madame Pince. She approached the latter, note in hand. “Restricted Section,” she explained.

Pince looked over the note. “Name?” she asked dully.

“Lily Evans,” she replied easily.

Pince's face darkened. "Evans..." She turned to look at her desk and read a piece of paper there. "...not to be... any...mmhmm... Well, Miss Evans, it seems I can not let you into the Restricted Section. Dumbledore's orders. Books are too fragile for students anyways," she grumbled.

"Why did Dumbledore say I couldn't go in?" Lily asked, furious though she didn't show it.

Pince consulted her paper. "Lack of control. Obviously doesn't want you learning any spells you could use to seriously hurt someone." She eyed Lily distrustfully for a long moment.

"Thank you for your time," Lily said cordially, steaming internally. How dare he! To show his distrust for her so blatantly was like he was trying to start a fight, almost saying that he didn't trust her and never would. "One more thing," Lily added to the librarian. "When did he give that to you?" she asked. She decided that if it had been right before Christmas then it was understandable. Maybe he had forgotten to take it back.

"Beginning of February," she read off the parchment. "Now I do believe it would best if you left my library now."

"Yes ma'am," Lily said humbly. Less than a month? Just when she had returned from America then. Did he assume that escape meant another? "How dare he?" she spat to herself as she left the library.

"I can feel how angry you are," Onyx said worriedly from his invisible perch around her neck. "What happened?"

"The Headmaster blocked me from the library," she said, keeping her voice calm. Did he really ever want her to join his Order? "Assumes I'm going to try to escape again. Which we all know is out of the picture." She didn't add that the reason she had been headed to the Restricted Section was to look up how to remove the bracelet confining her to Hogwarts. Dumbledore was smart not to trust her, a small voice reasoned. But she hadn't been trying to escape today... just keeping her options open should she decide to try again.

"If I was the Headmaster I wouldn't let you either. Libraries store knowledge—something a prisoner should never have," the Mark said.

Lily walked on silently, though inside she was churning with rage. Bones, Hagrid, Sirius Remus and James didn't treat her like a prisoner because they wanted her to join the Order... and because they liked her. Did the Headmaster not want her to join the Order? Was he setting her up to return to Voldemort just like the Mark and the Dark Lord himself?

[illegible]

“You’ve been quiet all day,” James said to Lily as they walked back from dinner, confident their conversation would be lost to the gossiping students around them. “Is something wrong?”

The girl was silent for a moment, but James let her sort out her thoughts patiently. “Can we talk somewhere more quiet? The Room of Requirement or someplace?” she asked softly, eyes sharp on their surroundings.

James nodded and allowed her to lead them there. They moved in an inconspicuous, nonchalant fashion out of the crowd and down a hallway towards the hidden room. In the silent hall, James decided it was all right to talk to Lily. “Is Onyx with you?” he asked casually.

He received a nod in reply. Catching his joking look of terror, she tried to suppress a smile and said, "I promise he won't mess with you. You're safe with me." The irony of the statement seemed to hit her and she gave a short, bitter laugh.

"I know," James said seriously. Her laughter died and she averted her eyes. "What?" She didn't reply.

They reached the empty stretch of hallway and paced back and forth together silently. James worried that she still considered herself a threat to the school despite her numerous redemptions.

Once they got in and settled on the plush couch the Room had provided, Lily said, "The Headmaster..." She began again. "Did the Headmaster ask you to convince me to join the Order?"

James sighed. "Lily, I told you. I'm friends with you—I'm your boyfriend—because I care for you. Not because of the Order," he reassured her.

"I know," she told him. "That's not why I'm asking. Did the Headmaster ever specifically tell you to persuade me to join the Order of the Phoenix?"

"Lily, what's this about?" James asked, concerned. Her emotions were well-shielded, so he knew there was more behind her words than appeared.

"The Headmaster blocked me from going into the Restricted Section. He hasn't taken off the bracelet. He's never approached me about joining the Order. He's never mentioned where he plans to 'keep me safe' from the Dark Lord after I graduate," she listed. Her voice was deadly serious. "Do you think he plans on me becoming a member of the Order? Not just as a spy, but a free member?"

"I..." Most of James wanted to reassure her with a hearty 'of course', but had he not just been worrying about that himself?

"Do you think the Headmaster will protect me from the Dark Lord, or even try?" she pressed, eyes locked his.

"Honestly? I don't know. But if he doesn't, I will," James said solemnly. "You're not going to be a spy. Not while I'm alive."

Though seeming not very reassured, Lily tentatively leaned her head against his shoulder to watch the crackling flames in the hearth. James smiled gently and ran his hand methodically through her long hair. "Thank you James," she murmured into his arm.

"No problem," he replied quietly.

Lily looked inside on the books that James had smuggled for her from the library, skimming for an entry on the Binding Bangle. Finally, in the fourth book, there was a reference to the device and a referral to a later page. She flipped there quickly and read the passage eagerly, only to find a brief summary of the workings and uses of it, and a sentence proclaiming it ‘extremely difficult and tedious’ for anyone but the person who put it on to take it off.

“Nope,” Lily said calmly, flipping to the first page.

“Actually, I’m all for leaving,” Onyx interrupted. “This place is too crowded and lous, and I don’t like any of the people here.”

Onyx gave an annoyed hiss. “There’s something going on here,” he said. “Why do the two of you no longer like each other?”

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt," the Mark said off-handedly, retreating behind her sleeve.

Lily gave a sigh and looped Onyx off of her neck so she could look at him. "I told you about the Dark Lord and bones," she began, "There's actually one more person who's been controlling what I do."

"Who?" Onyx hissed defensively. "I'll kill them for you," he assured her decisively.

"You can't. He's—"

"I'll defend you to the ends of the earth," Onyx proclaimed devotedly. "We can get Bones when he gets back and the Dark Lord when you see him. I can kill this new one," he repeated.

"He's been dead for centuries," Lily broke in. "Salazar Slytherin. His way of communicating with me is.." She trailed off, gesturing to her arm with a resigned shrug.

The hood on Onyx's neck rose furiously. His coiled body took up Lily's entire pillow and more, making an impressive picture when he looked angry as he did then. "Betrayal," he spat, eyes on Lily's sleeve.

Lily swiftly pushed away the fabric of her robes to reveal the tattoo. Caught in the open, the Mark of Salazar moved nonchalantly up her hand. "We're still brothers," it reminded Onyx. "I really do consider us—"

Onyx darted forward, so swiftly that Lily could barely jerk her arm out of the way of his two-inch long fangs despite her honed reflexes. "You bite him, you kill me," Lily reminded Onyx quickly.

The snake bowed his head guiltily and slinked back onto her pillow. "I apologize sister. I forgot," he said humbly.

Lily stroked his head reassuringly, saying, "I'd kill it if I could too." She gave an innocent blink when the Mark eyed her suspiciously. "But we're connected."

The Mark looked at her calmly for a moment before saying, "I suppose an extra hour of training tomorrow won't hurt you." With that, it slithered up farther so it was out of view of the two angry watchers.

Onyx gave her left sleeve an annoyed glare before moving his gaze to Lily. “America would be fun again,” he said wistfully.

“Sometimes I think you’re using me for my taste in sports cars,” Lily said lightly, relaxing with her friend. They carried on their conversation hours past midnight before turning in.

[illegible]

“Still no escape attempts,” Dumbledore reported to Edgar, standing before the fireplace in his deep violet robes. “I do believe her affection for Mister Potter will keep her around until graduation.”

Edgar tapped his fingers of the floor of his home thoughtfully, which was an odd sensation since his head was at Hogwarts. “Do you plan on inducting her into the Order before or after then?” he asked.

“You have mentioned, Edgar, your suspicion of her stability, correct?” Dumbledore asked calmly. At Edgar’s nod, he continued, “Then I am not certain forcing her to join the Order would be the best idea, do you agree? We discuss many things that should not reach Voldemort’s ears.”

“Then what do you expect her to do? Sit around in some classroom until Voldemort falls over dead of his own accord?” Edgar exclaimed, annoyed. He knew she wanted to contribute, to bring down her master.

“I was not suggesting she do nothing,” Dumbledore amended. “Allowing Miss Evans to serve as a spy against Voldemort without tying her down to Order membership would be more beneficial to both parties, correct?”

Edgar thought over his words. “You want Lily to risk her life to spy for you,” Edgar said slowly, controlling his anger, “with no official acknowledgment, no trust, in return? She’s much too intelligent to agree to that. Don’t make her choose sides if that’s what you’re planning, professor,” he warned. “You might not win.”

Review!

Lily socked the punching bag, imagining the Mark was slithering on it rather than on her ram

Lily socked the punching bag, imagining the Mark was slithering on it rather than on her ram. An extra hour of training... Lily round-house kicked the bag, then spun and punched it again as it swung back. Keeping the bag under a constant barrage of attack, Lily continued to fume. Was this just Salazar Slytherin's form of giving her detention? The extra work was nothing—she trained at least eight hours a day at Nightsahde Mansion—but the Mark having the power to make her work bothered her.

The castle clock pealed out to announce the time, echoing even into the confines of the Room of Requirement. Lily grabbed the punching bag to halt it, suddenly wary. Since when was there a thirteen o'clock? She snatched up the nearby towel the Room had provided, padding herself dry before tapping her clothes with her wand to transform them back into robes.

"What are you doing?" the Mark asked icily. "You still have thirty minutes left."

"Quiet," Lily demanded. "I..." she hesitated, unwilling to put it into words, though she started towards the door.

"What?" the Mark urged.

"Lily?" Onyx asked, sensing the tenseness in her tired body as she picked him up and left the room quickly. "Are you all right?"

"I think that was it. That was His sign," Lily murmured, eyes and ears alert. She calculated where the nearest window was, and then sprinted in that direction.

"Who?" Onyx asked, confused. He readjusted his grip on her so that his weight was more evenly distributed. Lily didn't answer, focusing on reaching the window.

She finally reached a window and looked out, nose touching the glass and panting breath misting it over. Her sharp eyes, which quickly

morphed into sharper canine ones, depicted the hints of what she'd been dreading. Spells being shot off at the school's front gate.

Lily's mind raced. She could hide in the Room of Requirement by asking it to shield her from the Dark Lord. Even as her mind thought of it, she dismissed it, already running down the stairs towards the entrance hall, wand in hand and ready to fight. Which side she'd be shooting for, she still wasn't sure.

Just as Lily reached the main floor, a small group of students emerged from the dungeons. Lily ignored them, headed towards the front doors.

"I knew it!" Bellatrix shrieked, loud enough to wake the whole castle. Lily instinctively ducked and rolled sideways, narrowly avoiding a bright flash of light.

She looked over at the Slytherins. Other than Bellatrix, who was facing Lily, they were standing uncertainly at the entrance of the dungeons. The distant sounds of the fight outside the castle gates had their attention.

Bellatrix took a step closer to Lily. "The sign," she murmured. "He told us to kill you when we got the sign!"

"Imbecile," Lily hissed, falling into character too easily. "The sign is to help me—"

"Avada—" Bellatrix began, eyes wild.

"Stupefy!" Lily's spell flashed, bathing the whole hall in its bloody color, and Bellatrix fell over, unconscious. "Get back to your dorms," she snapped at the other students. "All you can do you there is get caught or killed."

There was a silence before Severus spoke. "She's right. Rudolphus, if you'd get Bella..."

"Ennervate. Perticus Totalus," Lily intoned. Bellatrix's prone body stiffened. "Cast the counter when this is done," she instructed them.

Rudolphus strode forward and picked up his fiancé, using brute strength over magic. Once the trainee Death Eaters had vanished down the stairs, Lily hurried to the front door to find it locked against every spell she knew.

Annoyed, she moved to the nearest classroom and cast a spell at the window. The glass absorbed the light and refused to break. Dumbledore must have put the castle on lockdown once the Death Eaters had shown up. Anxious, with her heart racing, Lily ran up to the fourth floor as quickly as she could, becoming a wolf during long stretches of hallway to increase her speed. Finally coming to a window that overlooked the battle, she cast binocular and night-vision spells on her eyes so she could clearly see who was there, and who was winning.

One swift scan ascertained that Voldemort was not one of the fighters, though he might have been in the area, skiving the fight. She could see the majority of the professors shouting spells through the gates at the Death Eaters, though none of the Death Eaters's spells could pass through.

All that the Death Eaters were getting for their trouble were injuries. So why were they still... Suddenly, it clicked. Voldemort had set it up so that the teachers' backs were towards Lily and the Slytherins downstairs. All they had to do was sneak up and stun or kill the teachers and leave Lily with an easy escape.

Lily stood silent, watching the one-sided fight intently. Then, making her decision, she bolted towards the nearest staircase.

When she burst onto the Astronomy Tower roof minutes later, the status of the fight remained the same, though the Death Eaters were spouting more injuries.

Lily used her wand to send up green sparks. In Voldemort's code, red sparks meant 'proceed to next phase' while green meant 'abort'. She hoped the Death Eaters had been told to wait for such a sign if the frontal attack failed.

Sure enough, there was sudden flurry of cracks as the Death Eaters at the gate Apparated away with their fallen comrades.

Satisfied that they were gone and unlikely to return that night, Lily turned and went to the door. It was locked from the inside. Lily was certain that it had been unlocked when she had come out, and that no one had approached since she'd been there. Looking around, eyes sharp, Lily realized that the teachers were coming back to the school a bit too quickly for triumphant warriors.

It struck Lily then that they assumed there was a Death Eater on the roof, waiting like a sitting duck outside the locked door. If Dumbledore found her she would be able to try to explain, and remind him of Voldemort's letter. But if someone else arrived first her secret would be out and she might be turned in to the Ministry.

Lily went into autopilot then, mind quickly assessing her options to avoid the oncoming teachers. She had approximately five minutes until they were on her. She could jump, using some sort of spell to cushion her fall. But at this height, no spell could stop her from breaking bones. The Dark Lord had been planning on teaching her flight that summer, but she had no clue how at the moment.

"Accio Black Phoenix!" She summoned her broom, hoping it would arrive before the professors. Waiting impatiently, ears alert, Lily moved to the edge of the tower to be ready for its arrival.

Far too soon there were voices approaching. It sounded like every teacher at Hogwarts was on their way; coming to see what they believed was Voldemort's eye inside the castle.

The voices were close when Lily heard the distinctive muttering of Dumbledore's voice, speaking Latin. That meant that the door would soon be unlocked and the professors would find her at the scene of the crime.

Lily quickly swung her leg over the edge of the stone wall, despite quiet protests from Onyx, carefully climbing down the edge. She was only feet from the top when the door burst open and the large majority of Hogwarts professors came on to the roof.

“Search the roof,” commanded Dumbledore in his authoritative, deep voice. “Remember that they might be invisible.”

Breathly slowly and quietly, Lily kept her body close to the stone wall. Her grip on the stones was strong and she made sure that each step was in place before putting her weight down. Thankfully, one of the obstacles in the obstacle course in Nightshade Mansion was rock-climbing in the dark. Lily wondered if Voldemort had ever been in such a situation to know to prepare her for it.

“Maybe they had a broom with them,” suggested Professor Sinistra in a steady voice. “Could be out of the grounds all ready.”

Dumbledore replied reassuringly, “I cast a spell so that no brooms would function within fifty feet of this tower. If they did try, they would not survive the fall.”

“Should we check below, then?” McGonagall asked. Then she added dryly, “Someone else, though. I’d rather not clean up a splatted Death Eater.”

There were chuckles all around. “Actually, Minerva, that is not a bad suggestion. Poppy? Cufrey? Could you go?”

The door opened and closed again, signifying the two had followed his orders. Lily continued to move steadily down the wall, also moving slightly sideways. If she could just get fifty feet away...

“I don’t think they’re here, Albus,” McGonagall said finally. “We’ve tried spell upon spell to reveal them, but nothing’s come up yet. Could they have gotten inside before you locked the doors?”

“I suppose it’s possible,” Dumbledore admitted.

The door opened again. “No dead Death Eaters,” Professor Murphie reported. “Shame, that.”

“Maybe they climbed down?” suggested Robins, the Care of Magical Creatures professor.

“Looking at our Slytherins, I can’t imagine them thinking of that. Or living through it. We’d have found them at the bottom,” Pomfrey said bluntly. “Except maybe Bellatrix. The rest either don’t have the strength or the brains.”

“I suppose you all may turn in,” Dumbledore said wearily. “I’m sure we would have found them by now. Minerva? If you would remain with me, please?”

There was a shuffle as the teachers moved to the door. “Nothing like a battle to make you sleepy,” one remarked sarcastically.

“What is it, Albus?” McGonagall asked when the others had left. “Are you thinking the same as me? That...”

“That we do have a student who is both smart and strong? Why yes, Minerva, I am. Miss Evans?” Dumbledore said, no louder, but his summon was clear to Lily. She was within yards of the fifty foot mark, she thought, but if they looked down and saw her fleeing... As though reading her mind, Dumbledore continued, “It would be better for you to explain yourself rather than letting us make our own assumptions.”

It was true. But was he bluffing in hopes that she would respond if she was actually there? And would he really understand?

“Ouch,” Onyx muttered as his scales scraped against the rough stone when she continued quietly making her way down the wall.

“Shall I list the reasons I know you’re there? First of all, the spell I cast actually stopped broom functions throughout the grounds. Only you could know both the code to make them leave and know where to set it off.”

“I’m sure you had a reason,” McGonagall said calmly. “And if not, I’m sure you can lie convincingly enough. Either way, I can assure you that you won’t get in trouble. We just need to know for sure that there’s no other real Death Eaters on school grounds.”

Lily sighed, defeated. "Give me a minute to climb back up, and we can talk," she said in her normal voice.

When she reached the top of the tower, McGonagall and Dumbledore were seated in armchairs of Dumbledore's making, backs to the door. "Hello Miss Evans," the Headmaster greeted calmly as though the school had not been under attack a half hour before.

She did not reply, standing with her back to the stone wall and one hand remaining by her wand as she eyed the two professors. "Care to explain why you're out of bed?" McGonagall asked levelly.

"Should I bite them?" Onyx asked, looking calculatingly at the two Order members.

McGonagall seemed to notice the cobra for the first time. Lily wished that she had thought to reapply the invisibility charm to her familiar. "Is that..." McGonagall exclaimed, eyes wide behind her spectacles. The candles that Dumbledore had conjured everywhere grew brighter to illuminate her serpentine friend.

"Edgar gave it to her for her birthday," Dumbledore explained off-handedly, as though a student walking around with a snake around their neck was perfectly normal.

"Edgar gave her a snake for her birthday?" McGonagall repeated incredulously.

"The extra clock strike," Lily said, interrupting their conversation. "There were thirteen at midnight."

"And that woke you up?" McGonagall affirmed, raising her eyebrows.

"I was already awake," Lily said smoothly. "When I saw the fight, I ran up here and told them to abort."

"But why were they here in the first place?" McGonagall asked.

Lily spoke directly to Dumbledore. "I believe the clock was the sign he wrote of to me."

James awoke feeling relaxed and rested. One thing he loved about Hogwarts was how peaceful it was at night. "Friday," he said with a contented sigh. Last day until the weekend. He could get through it. He hoped. Remembering the two quizzes and the test he hadn't studied for, he groaned, and pulled his pillow over his head.

"Get up, James," Remus said, hearing the groan and thump. "We've got to get down to breakfast." When James refused to move, the lycan added, "Lily's probably waiting for you."

James threw off his covers, snatched his robes and raced to the bathroom to get ready. "You don't think she went down without me, do you?" he called to Remus, smoothing his hair back with his hands in the mirror.

"I doubt it," Remus assured him.

"You never know," Sirius said wickedly. "Hurry, James, hurry!"

"I don't know why it matters," Peter sniffed.

James emerged from the bathroom, glaring at the rat Animagus. "I dunno what's with you lately, Wormtail, but you need to get over it," he snapped.

"You're completely focused on this girl you know nothing about!" Peter exclaimed. "What if... what if she's just using you? What if there's more to her than meets the eye?"

"I know a lot about her, thank you," James growled. "And I'm not completely focused on her."

"Oh really? What are you doing tonight?" Peter challenged.

"Eating dinner," James replied loudly. "Is that a crime?"

"Nothing else?" Peter asked. Behind him, Remus and Sirius were watching James closely.

"Sleeping?" James replied sarcastically.

“And what made you assume the Stunner had sent up the sparks?” Voldemort asked coldly, wand never leaving the man’s face.

“Milord, who else would know the code?” The man seemed to realize he had said the wrong thing the moment the words left his mouth.

“Who else would know our code?” the Dark Lord repeated slowly. “Obviously, one person too many. Avada Kedavra.” The circle watched in silence as the victim slumped over in a bundle of black robes. “Now the Headmaster will increase the wards on the front gates. That is no longer an option. Congratulations—you all completely failed.” He paused, allowing them to feel his fury and imagine the consequences. “Get out of my sight,” he snapped.

There was a nearly simultaneous crack as the congregation vanished. The Dark Lord waited until they had all gone to let out an enraged tell and set the forest around him ablaze with a quick spell. He stood for a moment, watching the flames grow detachedly. Then, suddenly, he was gone, leaving the flames to grow out of control.

[illegible]

“Tonight’s our dinner night,” James reminded Lily as they walked out of their final class of the day.

"I know." Her gaze was distant as she spoke, thought obviously elsewhere. "I'll see you there."

"I was hoping we could hang out until then," James suggested. She didn't speak and he felt embarrassed. "Or I could just see you there."

"It's not that I don't..." she trailed off.

James felt guilty then for making her uncomfortable. “No, it’s all right,” he assured her. “I’ll just—”

"I have something I have to do," she explained.

“And you can’t tell me,” James finished dully.

She paused. “Actually,” she said as they neared the portrait of the Fat Lady, “I think I could show you. I can trust you.”

"Of course," James said immediately.

Lily looked around the filled Common Room and said, "Meet me down here in a half hour," she said quietly.

James nodded and watched her slip away upstairs, feeling rather confused.

[illegible]

“In the forest?” James said doubtfully. He was paused at a line of freshly planted black-thorn bushes.

"It's not dangerous," the girl promised. Her dark red hair was pulled into its usual tight ponytail and she seemed completely calm by the dangerous woods, which she probably was.

“All right,” James conceded, taking a breath before stepping into the woods.

"It's not too far in, but I hope you're wearing comfortable shoes," she said, leading the way through the woods. She thoughtfully held the branches out long enough so they wouldn't whip back on to him.

“What are we going to see?” James asked again. She gave no answer, and he sighed. “I like being the one keeping the surprise,” he complained.

“Too bad,” she said, amused. “Watch your step,” she warned. James’s head snapped down and he noticed his foot was inches above the hole filled with tangled roots that would have tripped him.

“Thanks,” he said, stepping carefully over it. “You can’t see out of the back of your head, can you?” he asked suspiciously.

“You mean did I kill Moody, take his eye, charm it to look like mine, and then use it to stop you from tripping?” She paused, giving James the opportunity to chuckle. “No.” James wasn’t sure whether she was joking when she added, “Not yet.”

After walking so long that James had lost track of time, Lily said, “It’s just through these trees.” Sure enough, James realized that he could see fresh light streaming through the trees ahead. He subconsciously picked up the pace, eager for the surprise and to be out of the eerie forest.

He emerged from the trees and caught sight of a small wooden structure. Lily was already walking towards it, and he hurried to catch up. As he neared he realized that the shoddy house was actually a stall. Ahead of him, Lily reached over the door and leaned forward to pet whatever was inside.

“What...?” James asked as he stepped closer. At first, the stall seemed empty, but looking closer he could see what looked like a horse. “Is it a ghost?” he breathed, stepping closer. ‘

“No,” Lily said reassuringly. “You know what a thestral is, right?”

James looked at the creature closely. It was silver and skeletal, with a small horn on its forehead. “Well, I do, but I can’t see them.”

“This is a thestral mixed with a unicorn,” she told him. “I was hoping you’d be able to see her.”

“I can, but she’s blurry. It seems like I can...” He put out his hand towards the foal, expecting to pass through. He jumped when his outstretched hand collided with its silky, quite solid, fur. “Whoa.”

“Her name is Shade,” Lily told him as she unlatched the stall door. “Hagrid found her.” She entered the stall, holding the door open for James. When he hesitated, she added, “She won’t hurt you.”

At first, the mixed filly was shy of him, prancing beside Lily. However, once he relaxed, she was just as at ease with him as with Lily.

The two Gryffindors stood together in easy companionship, talking about everything and nothing. After an hour of so, Lily glanced around and said, "We need to head back to the castle."

James nodded, gave Shade a final pat, then followed Lily back into the dark forest. James was more calm on the way back, though the darkening forest impaired his vision. When Lily had stopped him from falling the tenth time, she said, "Why don't you morph your eyes? It works, I promise."

After several tries he succeeded and was able to see the forest around them more clearly. "I can see now," he told Lily before promptly tripping over a tree root.

Lily was immediately beside him, pulling him to his feet. "Well," he amended, "As good as I could see before."

The girl gave a laugh and began to lead the way again. "Yeah, well, I never said morphing your eyes would make you smarter."

James gave a mock-offended gasp. "Are you implying that I'm stupid??" he said, hand splayed dramatically over his heart, though she couldn't see him.

"If you weren't, would you have needed to ask?" she replied. "I'm just teasing," she added. "You're very sharp."

"Thank you," James said, grinning to himself. "Hey, Lily, are you— Wait, I know the answer. Here's a better one. Would you mind me staying here over spring vacation?"

"That's soon, isn't it?" she asked.

"Next week's our last," James informed her. "So..."

"Of course you can stay," Lily said smoothly. "I can't stop you."

"Yeah," James said, annoyed he had to pose the question again and how red his face was turning. "but do you want to hang out with me for a week? Sirius is going to Remus's, and Peter's off on vacation,

so I thought you and I could hang out, just the two of us. We can eat in the kitchens and come out here and sneak into Hogsmeade and walk—”

Lily suddenly froze and put her hand up in the air. Her entire body was tense and her wolf eyes scanned the forest around them as she turned to face him. “What is it?” James whispered, on edge.

“I thought I...” She trailed off, head cocked. Her eyes suddenly sharpened and she dove forward, knocking James to the ground. There was a sharp thump and James looked up to see an arrow quivering the tree behind them. “Stay down,” Lily hissed.

Warily, the girl removed herself from James, standing slowly. “We don’t mean any harm,” she said loudly, though James could see her wand in her hand.

There was a loud churching as someone, or something, stepped from the forest. “You are on our land,” said a cool voice. “You are harboring a being that should not exist.”

“Are you talking about the thestral-unicorn baby?” Lily asked clearly and calmly. James, who could only see Lily looming over him, tried to place the other’s voice. “She does not pose a threat,” Lily said.

“You saved something that should have died,” another voice said. “It is the way of things.” The sound of crunching leaves continued as more of whatever approached them. “You must stop coming here.”

“No,” Lily said calmly. “As long as she does not cause any trouble, I see no reason to abandon her. And I can guarantee she will be gone by summer, and will not return to this forest.”

“Or we could kill you, and then kill the halfling,” said a new voice harshly.

James scrambled to his feet. “Wait!” he exclaimed, spinning a circle and staring at the small circle of centaurs surrounding them. Surprised by his sudden movement, one centaur let loose an arrow. If not for Lily’s quick action of pulling him sideways, the arrow would

have connected with his head. Instead it lodged itself inches deep into a nearby tree. "You can't just kill her... us," James said, looking back at the quivering arrow.

A tall bay centaur spoke, "Oak spoke rashly. He is young and has yet to learn to control his tongue. If you promise that by summer it will be gone, we can accept it until then."

"Thank you," Lily said, bowing her head. James gave an uncertain smile. "I will take your word that she will not be harmed."

The centaur nodded, and motioned to the rest of the small group to leave. Once they had faded back into the woods, Lily turned. "James..." she sighed. Shaking her head, she started walking forward again.

"What?" James asked cautiously.

There was a pause. "I was wrong. You are an idiot, you know that?" she said, her voice as emotionless as it had ever been.

"Yeah," James said woefully, trying to lighten the mood.

She chuckled slightly, and James detected a slight shaking in her shoulder. "Are you all right?" he asked. He sped up so he was alongside her and gently grabbed her arm. When she stopped and faced him, James could tell she was shaken. "What is it?"

"You could have died back there, do you realize that?" Her voice was perfectly level.

"We could have taken them," James said lightly. "You were handling it well," he added.

"If I hadn't compromised, they would have killed her... and maybe us too."

"Lily, you're being ridiculous," James said firmly. "Like you couldn't take on an army of basilisks, much less a few centaurs."

“Would you bet your life on it?” she asked harshly.

“Yes,” he challenged. “But it doesn’t matter now. It’s all settled. Everything’s good.”

“What about next time? What if Voldemort shows up? If I tell you to stay down, would you hop up again the second there was trouble?”

“Yes, I would,” James said, “And you can’t stop me. You may have more power than me, but that doesn’t mean you have to protect me. Let me try to protect you for once.”

“No,” she said, obstinate. “I’m not going to date you if you’re going to go putting yourself in unnecessary danger.”

“Listen, Lils, let’s just agree to disagree on his. You won’t dump me and I won’t let you die. So let’s get back to the castle, have a nice, romantic dinner, and relax. All right?”

“Fine,” she snapped, turning back to the castle. James gave a triumphant grin and followed.

[illegible]

Breakfast in the Great Hall on the first day of spring vacation was so much quieter than usual that the remaining students subconsciously spoke in lower voices so as not to disturb the quiet

Breakfast in the Great Hall on the first day of spring vacation was so much quieter than usual that the remaining students subconsciously spoke in lower voices so as not to disturb the quiet.

The story was quite different in the kitchens. James was performing an impromptu drum solo using several upturned pots and silverware. “Boom, baboom baboom,” James sang along with his drumming. “I once knew a girl, her name was Lily, boom baboom baboom. She didn’t think she was funny, but she acted silly, boom baboom baboom. She thinks my song is stupid, but I don’t care, boom baboom baboom. She has pretty green eyes and long red—”

“Hair,” Lily interjected, amused.

“Toenails,” James said, “Boom baboom baboom. She thinks she knows the words of this song, boom baboom baboom, but it turns out that she’s—”

“Wrong.”

“Inaccurate,” he corrected her, grinning. He crashed two pans together, then bowed theatrically.

“That was lovely,” Lily said, innocently putting a hand to her ear and snapping her fingers to make sure she could still hear.

“Ha ha,” James said at her antics. “Like you could do better.”

“Probably not,” Lily admitted. “So, other than hurting my ears... I mean, playing the drums, what’s on the agenda for the day?”

“I’ve got a few plans,” James said evasively, “but I need to check the Map and see who stayed in school for the break.” He went over to his bag, pulled out the Marauder’s Map and spread it on the table Lily was seated at, avoiding their empty plates. “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.”

Ink lines spread across the Map, outlining the path of every person in the castle. James scanned the parchment first for anyone not in the Great Hall. There was one person asleep in the second year Slytherin girls' dormitory, as well as Tonks in her respective dormitory, but no others. Looking then to the Great Hall, James saw that no Slytherins older than fourth year had stayed, and there was only a smattering of students at the other tables.

"No one we have to worry about," Lily noted. "Students, at least," she muttered when she traced the staff table with her finger. In addition to the normal names was Alastor Moody.

"Why's he here?" James asked, surprised. He looked up when Lily didn't express the same type of wonder. "Why is he here?" he asked, narrowing his eyes. There was something she wasn't telling him.

Lily looked around the kitchen at the house-elves. "Let's go somewhere else," she suggested. At James' protest, she added, "I can't tell you in here." She turned her attention to the servants. "Thanks for the wonderful meal."

The house-elves thanked them for stopping by and shoved several snacks for the road into their unwilling hands. "Where would you like to go?" Lily asked him.

"Room of Requirement," James said immediately. "That way we don't need to worry about other people walking in on us."

"Walking in on us?" she quoted, eyebrows raised.

"You know what I meant," he said, laughing. When they reached the hidden room and were safely inside, situated on the couch with chilled butterbeers on the table in front of them, James said, "So why is Moody here?"

"A few nights ago Death Eaters attacked the school," she told him directly.

“What?” he exploded. “Why didn’t you tell me? You didn’t fight them, did you? Honestly, Lily, what—”

“James,” she said calmly, raising a hand to calm him. “I didn’t get within a hundred yards of them. The professors were fighting them at the gates, and I sent them away.”

“How?” he asked curiously.

“Sparks. They couldn’t even see me. The Dark Lord might not even realize it was me—Bellatrix and the others tried to go out and help them too,” Lily explained.

“That’s it?” James asked suspiciously. “They fought, you got rid of them, and everything was good?”

“Does it matter?” she asked, voice suddenly sharp. “Do you tell me everything that happens to you?”

“Well, I would if anything ever actually happened,” he answered. “If you really don’t want to tell me, you don’t have to. You know what, let’s just go play some Quidditch.” He started to stand up, but Lily stopped him with a hand on his arm. “I’m serious, Lils,” he said. “You don’t have to tell me.”

“Dumbledore thought I was helping them,” she admitted, face stony. “He and McGonagall interrogated me when I talked to them.”

“That’s stupid,” James said bluntly, meeting Lily’s eyes. “We all know you don’t want to help Vo—him anymore.”

“Obviously not everyone believes that,” she said quietly. Her eyes darted up to his, an emotion in her eyes that he couldn’t identify.

“But now, after you helped get rid of the Death Eaters, he believes you, right?” James asked, trying to discern where the problem remained.

Lily paused, weighing her words with obvious carefulness. “James, I don’t know for sure,” she said diplomatically.

“But you don’t think he does,” James assessed, feeling fury ride within him. After everything she’d done, how could anyone, especially Dumbledore, doubt her?

“I’m just paranoid,” Lily said, picking up her butterbeer and looking away. James suddenly realized that she thought his sudden anger was directed to her.

“That git,” James said darkly. “You can’t help, you can’t leave—What does he want from you?” he exclaimed, standing up and pacing in front of the couch.

“You’re part of the Order,” Lily reminded him. “You can’t just—”

“Oh really?” James said. He took a deep breath and sat down beside her. “Dumbledore isn’t Voldemort,” he assured her, trying to assure himself. “That’s the point. We’re supposed to be on the good side, working for justice and equality.”

“You’re an idealist,” she told him bluntly. “Not everyone is. The Headmaster wants to win this war.”

Feeling hopeless, James said, “Not that badly. Not enough to make you go back.”

“Really? Tell that to Severus,” Lily asked. She took a breath, and said, “Never mind. I’m speaking rashly.” Her voice was emotionless once more. She was on edge and the fact that she didn’t show him hit James like a curse. He wasn’t Voldemort, or Dumbledore, not Moody or Bones. He was just a love struck boy who wanted to help... and she was scared to show him what she was feeling.

“Lily, will you be honest with me?” James pleaded.

“That depends.”

“I’m serious, Lils. Tell me you’ll answer my question honestly.” He met her eyes, trying to show his sincerity. At her hesitant nod, he took a deep breath. “Are you scared of me?”

Whatever Lily had been expecting him to ask, this was apparently not it. Her face stayed completely blank, and she replied, "Shouldn't I be asking you that?" Her voice was icy. "How could you ever delude yourself into thinking that I fear you?" She spoke slowly and deliberately. "There—"

"Lily," James tried to interrupt.

"There are people I'm afraid of," she admitted. "You don't make the list. You may somehow think you have control over me, but you do not."

"Lily, that's not what I meant. Not at all. Listen to me," he said, desperate to remove her from that train of thought. "I just wanted to make sure that you're not..." He searched for the right word, "suspicious of me."

He sought her eyes. When she remained silent, he continued, "Every time you get that look in your eyes, that blank look, or when you agree with what I say even when I know you don't, it's like you're kicking me in the stomach. Could you just try to trust me?" She still didn't reply. "Legitimize me! You can trust me."

She shook her head. Before James could say anything else, she spoke, "I don't need to."

James frowned. "Everyone needs to trust someone."

"Not that. I already believe you. James, I don't think you realize what this is like for me. For the past six years, I've been under constant watch. One move wrong and I knew what was coming. It's hard to just forget all of that and give someone my trust. I'm trying though, because I want to trust you."

James smiled at her, and grasped her hand tightly in his. They sat quietly for a moment, then James smiled and said, "Are you still up for the plans I made for today?"

"Are you going to tell me what they are?" she asked.

around her, curious what held her up. “It’s just a piece of wood—with an Invisibility Cloak as a tablecloth.”

“This is amazing,” Lily said, staring down at the waters under her.

“I brought lunch,” James said, holding up a picnic basket with a smile. As he sat and began pulling out food, Lily sighed. “Honestly, the house-elves make us more food than the rest of the school combined.”

“Ah, they like it. I let them make whatever they wanted today. Mmm, chicken,” he said, pulling out several fried chicken legs.

He set two on the plate in front of Lily, followed by a generous scoop of potatoes and another of squash. “Eat up!” he said before enthusiastically filling his own plate even fuller than hers.

“This is delicious,” Lily said when she took a bite. “Try the squash,” she recommended.

“So, you like this?” he asked, gesturing to encompass the entire lake.

“It’s wonderful,” she assured him.

“I’m glad.” His voice was sincere. They finished their meal in companionable conversation, then sat together, still talking, even after the last crumbs of the dessert were gone.

“You’re planning on becoming an Auror after you graduate, right?” Lily ascertained, leaning back on her palms.

“Yeah,” James told her. “At least, I’m going to try. Competition into the Auror training program is fierce.”

“I’m sure you’re going to get in,” she said confidently.

“So what gave away that that’s what I want to do?” James asked. “My outstanding skills, my brains, or my looks?”

“Your course schedule, actually,” Lily said. “But your skills, brains, and looks told me I was right.”

“What about you?” James inquired. “Once you graduate, what do you want to do?”

“What I want to do and what I will be doing are two completely different things,” she said stiffly. “We probably should head back to the castle now,” she said, changing the subject.

“But—”

“I don’t want whatever charm you put on this thing to run out while we’re still in the middle of the lake,” Lily said, beginning to put the empty plates back in the picnic basket.

“All right,” James agreed resignedly. He waved his wand and muttered a few spells, sending them drifting back to shore.

After a few moments in sullen silence, James said, “I’m sorry.”

“What?” Lily was surprised into asking.

“For saying whatever I said that made you mad,” he said. His hazel eyes met hers.

“I just don’t want to talk about my future now,” she admitted reluctantly. “This week should be so great. Can we just forget about the future... and the past?”

James nodded, relaxing. His gaze shifted over her shoulder towards the shore and his face froze.

Cautiously, Lily asked, “What’s wrong?”

“I dunno if you’re going to be able to get by with forgetting the past,” he said, gesturing behind her.

Lily turned and saw Moody standing on the shore, leaning heavily on a wooden crutch. He was looking straight at her.

“Hello Potter,” Moody growled once James had helped Lily disembark the invisible table. “Evans.”

“Hello,” James replied, arm still around Lily’s waist though she was firmly on the sand. “What are you doing here?”

“After certain events I felt the school needed extra security,” he said, eyes on Lily. She was watching him coolly, apparently absolved to silence.

“Security?” James asked.

“The next attack will be stronger and one after that even stronger,” Moody told him with certainty.

“How do you know? They might’ve given up,” James said, thought not believing his own words.

Moody rolled his eyes, obviously not believing it either. “Evans,” he said, turning back to Lily, “can you tell me exactly how you knew there was an attack on the school?”

“I was already awake,” she said tensely. “I heard the signal.”

“What signal?” Moody asked quickly, eager to catch her in an inconsistency.

“The clock,” she said shortly. “Thirteen chimes,” she elaborated at Moody’s urging.

“I expect you had a bad dream, and that’s why you were up? Going to get some hot cocoa and a teddy bear?” he asked mockingly, disbelief heavy in his gravelly voice.

“I was still doing homework,” Lily lied icily.

James interjected into the conversation. “We were just about to go see Hagrid,” he said smoothly. “So if that’s everything...?”

Moody eyed James for a minute, and then nodded. "Next time just keep doing your 'homework,'" he warned Lily. "We can handle it." As he limped away, Lily and James turned and began walking towards Hagrid's cabin.

“Sure, I’ll let him handle it next time,” Lily said coolly to James. “Handle it right into his own grave.”

“You really should you know,” James said, casting a sideways glance at her. “Not the grave part, but letting him take care of it. He is an Auror.” Lily nodded, but James could tell she was withholding something. “What is it?” he prodded.

“You’re right that he’s an Auror,” she conceded, “But I’m a Death Eater, and sometimes it takes on to beat one.”

James wished he could disagree.

[illegible]

"Keep your palms flat," Lily warned.

James eyed Shade's protruding canine teeth suspiciously, but held out the rock cake without pause. Shade sniffed the dessert once before snapping it up, chewing loudly. "How'd you find out she likes these?" James asked, reaching for another of the rock cakes.

“Trial and error,” she told him, running her fingers through Shade’s mane. The half-breed had grown rapidly over the last several months, inheriting its thestral mother’s rate of maturity. Now she could look Lily in the eye, her elongated black horn grazing just over Lily’s head. Since Lily was more petite, James found himself having to duck every time Shade turned to look at him.

"I'm going to try riding her today," Lily announced. "I've been adjusting her to having weight on her back when she walks, so she shouldn't be spooked."

“Do you have a saddle?” James asked, looking around the small stall for evidence of one.

“No, I’d have to order a special one, and I don’t want to try to explain how I got her to anyone,” Lily explained, attaching a lead to Shade’s worn, secondhand bridle, and walking her out of the stall.

“You got her from Hagrid though,” James said, confused as he followed at a safe distance from the filly’s hooves.

“Exactly.” Lily tossed the lead rope to James and he caught it instinctively. “Don’t let go,” she said, meeting his eyes. After resting her hands heavily on Shade’s back, Lily deftly jumped up and settled herself with her legs in front of the strong white leathery wings. She immediately began muttering to Shade, trying to calm her as she paced nervously back and forth. Once she had stopped pacing, Lily motioned to James to lead the mixed breed forward. Shade walked uncertainly, trying to look at the weight on her back, though James kept her head firmly forward.

By the end of the afternoon, Shade was comfortable with Lily on her back, and Lily was able to hold the bridle for herself. Once Lily finished her last lap around the meadow, she dismounted next to James. “Are you ready to head back to school?” she asked, holding Shade’s lead loosely in her hand.

“Sure,” he replied, offering another rock cake to Shade, who ate eagerly. Once they settled Shade in for the night, the two teens walked back to the castle, James’s arm securely on Lily’s waist.

After a meal in the kitchens, James and Lily strolled up to the deserted Gryffindor Common Room. They settled together on the couch in front of the crackling fire, which remained bright despite the warmth of the spring day.

“That was fun,” Lily said, reclining into James shoulder, her red hair glinting in the fire.

“Yeah,” James agreed softly. She looked over at him to find him watching her closely.

“What is it?” she asked, sitting up.

After only a slight hesitation, he replied, “I’d thought I was in love with you from the day I met you in first year. I was wrong. This is what being in love feels like.”

"I think I know what you mean," she said, lifting up to press her lips against his.

[illegible]

Somewhere hundreds of miles away, a small figure stood trembling in the center of a circle, masks gleaming around him.

“Do you swear complete allegiance to the cause and to me?” a voice hissed.

“Yes,” was the quivering answer.

“Will you fight to the death to achieve our goal, with certain death if you do not?”

“Yes.”

The slender figure of the Dark Lord glided forward, red eyes gleaming hungrily. Suddenly, he grabbed the small one's arm, thrust back the sleeve, and stabbed the white flesh with his wand. He screamed, falling to the ground as a ghastly skull burned its place on his skin.

The Dark Lord stood triumphantly over the crumpled boy. “Then welcome, Wormtail,” he said.

[illegible]

Over the next week, the two teenagers forget the rest of the world, falling more in love with each passing hour together. No amount of training could have prepared Lily for this, the constant feeling of

simultaneous trust and joy. In all activities, from forbidden jaunts to Hogsmeade to simply sitting in the Room of Requirement and talking together, Lily found herself falling in love with no worries of ever hitting the ground.

But ground there was, and late at night, lying in her otherwise empty dormitory, she knew it and felt it looming towards her, expanding to fill her vision. Once the break ended, there would be only two months left until graduation. It was then her destiny would overtake her. Each night she would grow determined to distance herself from James to make the inevitable break from him easier, but her resolve dissolved each morning when she met him in the Common Room.

The Mark of Salazar had been silent recently, knowing her resignation to her future. Moody had not approached her since their last confrontation, and with bones back at his Ministry job, no one at Hogwarts seemed to care how she was spending her last weeks.

The train carrying the sun-tanned (or, in some cases, sun-burned) students returning from the break arrived far too soon for Lily. She and James met his three best friends at the station. Sirius and Remus were both bronzed and beaming, while Pettigrew seemed, if possible, more pale. However, he was more amiable than he had been before the break, though Lily sometimes caught him staring off into space, eyebrows furrowed.

School picked up at a snowballing rate, the teachers and students frantically preparing for the upcoming final exams. Essays piled up, leaving the seventh years up past midnight every night to stay on schedule. Everyone was intent on studying, since results of the NEWTs played an important role in getting hired for job.

Lily tried to join in the devotion to school but often wondered why she bothered. How could NEWT scores affect future? If she failed her Defense exam would Voldemort decide he didn't need her? Still, she put forth the effort towards her classes, allowing them to temporarily distract her.

Once the studying for the week was over, Lily and James were able to spend time together, though usually in the company of Sirius or

Remus. When they were alone their conversation stayed well clear of the future, inclusive of the NEWTs and Lily's fears, but ranged from the Phlightly Phoenixes surprising winning steak in the Great Britain Quidditch Little League to the prices of the silver-laced cauldrons they were forced to purchase for Potions class.

Though the Auror did not confront Lily again, James's Marauders' Map revealed that Moody remained in the castle and often stalked the halls past hours. The pair used the map to navigate their way safely around the castle at night. Midnight would often find the two students in the kitchens snacking on whatever the house-elves fancied making.

It was on one such night that James reminded Lily, "The Quidditch championship is tomorrow. You're coming, right?"

Lily swallowed the bite of éclair she had been chewing as she nodded. "Of course," She affirmed.

"Excellent. Now we can't lose," James said confidently.

"What am I, your good luck charm?" Lily asked, rolling her eyes at the absurdity of the idea.

"No," James told her grinning, "There's just no way my ego could handle losing to Hufflepuffs in front of my girlfriend."

"Well, if you're so determined not to lose, you might need to get some sleep tonight," Lily decided, glancing at the clock.

Grudgingly, James abandoned his half-eaten carrot cake and allowed Lily to lead him up to the Gryffindor Tower. As they walked, Lily suddenly paused, head swiveling to the side. The faint sound of someone's footsteps seemed to dominate her ears. "What?" James asked worriedly, obviously not hearing the quiet steps.

"Someone's coming," she hissed, pulling him into a shadowed alcove and pressing into a corner. Just as the two were out of sight the footsteps arrived in the hallway. Lily listened carefully—no clunk of crutches, so not Moody, not the shuffle of Filch, no heels, so not a

female. Slow, confident strides... "Dumbledore," she hissed into James's ear.

The steps neared their hideout and passed by. James sighed in relief. The steps stopped. "I remember when I spent my nights in various niches of this castle with various people," Dumbledore's voice said nostalgically, before his footsteps continued forward. "It was against the rules then too, I believe. Goodnight."

Once the footsteps had gone, Lily rolled her eyes and stepped back from James. "He immediately assumes we're snogging," she muttered to him.

"Actually, it's not a bad idea," he countered, pulling her back into his chest and kissing her.

"Quidditch," she reminded him, though she found speaking with two pairs of lips both difficult and wonderfully distracting.

James gave a petulant sigh and let her go. "This had better make us win," he grumbled as they walked back up the dormitory.

This, Lily thought, is why I never come to Quidditch games. On all sides of her, Gryffindors were on their feet and yelling at the top of their lungs. Even Remus, who was more reserved than most usually, joined in on her left. “Hit him. Sirius!” he shouted, waving a gold and red flag over his head.

As though able to hear Remus’s yell, Sirius knocked the Buldger straight at the Hufflepuff Chaser. The vicious ball knocked into the broom and sent it spinning off-course. When the boy dropped the ball to grab onto his broom, James was underneath to catch it and zoom towards the goal posts.

When James tossed the Quaffle in under the Keeper’s grasp, the commentator (a Ravenclaw named Rodgers) announced, “And that puts Gryffindor at just 20 above Hufflepuff! The game is close!”

It got closer: the Hufflepuffs managed to score three consecutive goals. Sirius knocked a Bludger within feet of the Gryffindor Keeper and his shout of, “Wake up, you idiot!” could be distinguished over the cheers of the yellow and black portion of the stands.

Despite the tight game, Lily kept her eyes on James the entire time—his face was so animated when he played Quidditch. Even without the groans or cheers from the surrounding stands, Lily could tell exactly how the game was going from James’s face.

“The Snitch!” Remus hissed, pointing in the air. Both Seekers spotted it at the same time, and both sped towards it at once. Lily saw James swivel his broom and shoot off towards the Seekers. Confused, Lily watched him approach the Snitch with the other two players. Suddenly, he swerved, moving right in front of the Hufflepuff Seeker. She jerked her broom, disoriented, which gave the Gryffindor Seeker the advantage and, subsequently, the Golden Snitch.

“It’s over! Gryffindor’s got the Quidditch Cup!” Rodgers proclaimed to the stands. There was an explosion of cheers from the red part of the stands. The teams landed and James, the team captain, hoisted his trophy into the air, beaming.

Lily clapped wildly, and joined her House as they rushed to the pitch. The collective sense of excitement and triumph was radiating from each of the Gryffindors. James displayed the trophy to the crowd, soaking up the admiration.

When he spotted Lily, he quickly handed the trophy off to Sirius, who gladly took it, and rushed to Lily's side. "We won!" he exclaimed.

“You were amazing,” she told him, smiling broadly. He swept her into a sweaty hug and kissed her deeply. It took Lily approximately ten seconds to realize he was kissing her in the center of the Quidditch pitch in front of every person in the school, including the Slytherins.

By the time she broke away, she knew it was too late. Even the Gryffindors around her looked surprised. Though they had been sitting together for several months, this was the first public display of their relationship and everyone had seen it.

“Get you some, Prongs,” Sirius said, having sidled up beside them, and passed the trophy elsewhere.

James rolled his eyes and shoved his friend with the hand that wasn't still locked on Lily's waist. His eyes were bright with victory, and he looked so happy that Lily couldn't help smiling at him.

“Party in the Common Room!” Sirius shouted over the chatter, and there was a huge cheer from all of the students listening.

[illegible]

And a party it was. With the newly won Quidditch Cup hovering in the center of the room, the Gryffindors all forgot about their problems and ensued in merriment. All, of course, but one. Out of respect for James, Lily did not hide in her dorm all night away from the excitement—she even set Onyx aside so she could go to the party and brush shoulders with people and not get them snake-bitten (Needless to say, the cobra was extremely miffed she had left him behind.)

Lily took a goblet of pumpkin juice (giving it a small sip to check for the subtle shot of Firewhiskey that seemed to have found its way into several other people's drinks) and settled herself at one of the few tables not laden with snacks from the kitchen. James had insisted on sitting with her for several minutes until she convinced to go enjoy himself talking with the triumphant Gryffindors.

After a few minutes of sitting by herself and calculating how long it would take Voldemort to hear about her kiss, Remus slumped into the chair beside her. "Hey Lilt," he greeted. She nodded to him, setting down her drink. "Not in the mood to party?" His tone was teasing because he knew perfectly well she was not one to 'party.'

"That was a good match," she remarked, leaning back in her chair.

"James was glad you showed," Remus told her. "There was no way he was going to lose."

"He said the same thing," Lily said, giving a small smile. Her eyes found him in the crowd. His face was alight and his hair tousled as he talked animatedly to a small group of sixth years. From his elaborate hand gestures, Lily figured he was re-enacting the match.

She turned back to see Remus regarding her thoughtfully. He gave an almost indiscernible sigh and said softly, "What are you going to do?" His amber eyes were solemn and pensive.

Lily realized that even if James kept denying it, Remus knew what the end of the school year was going to bring for her. Despite Lily's attempts to hide her feelings, Remus could see what she was thinking. How was she going to be able to live as the Stunner after loving James? "I don't know," she admitted.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, watching the party around them. Suddenly, Sirius bounded over. From his energy, Lily figured he had been the one passing around the Firewhiskey, and helping himself to the bottle. "C'mon, time to dance!" The volume of the music increased with a wave from Sirius's wand, and he quickly swept a nearby fifth year girl into an exaggerated tango.

Lily and Remus rolled their eyes. “I’m heading out before James decides he wants to dance too,” Lily said, standing up.

Remus nodded and leaned back in his chair. "I'll see you tomorrow," he said easily.

Lily waved to James when she caught his eye, indicating that she was leaving. He excused himself from his fans and approached Lily. "Already?"

“Yes—I’m not really a party girl,” she told him, shrugging with a smile. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Okay,” James said, obviously disappointed.

“You did really amazing,” she told him, giving him a peck on the lips. “Goodnight.”

"Night Lily," he conceded.

[illegible]

“We have to tell him,” Bellatrix said decisively to the rest of the younger Death Eaters. They sat alone in the dark Common Room, clustered beside the dim fire though the dank chill air from the dungeons still kept those further back shivering. “We have to tell him now.”

“He did kiss her,” Narcissa ventured quietly, perched on the arm of Bellatrix’s chair. “And she is pretending to be his girlfriend.”

"Good actress," someone muttered.

“The Dark Lord should know,” Bellatrix insisted. “Snape!” she snapped, “You write to him—tonight—and tell him about his precious Stunner.”

Severus nodded and left the dark group to return to his dorm room. The room was of a common four-poster variety, and the only signs

that anyone out of the normal student population occupied it were the book titles on the desks and the masks hidden at the bottom of each trunk.

The boy sat at his desk, tapping the only candle with his wand to ignite the flame. He pulled out a piece of parchment, a quill, and an inkwell. He sat quietly for a minute, and then put back the materials without penning a single word. There were some things that Voldemort didn't need to know.

[illegible]

The next Saturday in the heart of the Forbidden Forest in a secluded clearing, a lithe young redhead was practicing riding a thestral-unicorn filly, with results as mixed as the breed. The afternoon was pleasant and peaceful, and Lily found herself enjoying the rhythm of Shade walking slowly under her.

There was a thump as Lily fell sideways off Shade when she took an unexpected leap sideways. The warmth of the day had dulled Lily's senses, making her sleepy and peaceful, and she grabbed onto Shade's bridle as soon as she had recovered her feet. Laughter came from above where James flew his broom. "Not funny!" she called up to him, dusting off her rode.

He swooped down beside her, causing Shade to snort nervously. “Au contraire,” he said, “quite funny. I thought she was getting better.”

“It was my fault,” Lily said, clicking her tongue. Shade looked over at her, ears perked. Lily gave her the rock cake that had become her favorite treat, and leapt fluidly astride the creature, legs secure behind her wings. Seeing that Lily was not injured, James flew back up, spiraling lazily in the sky.

Shade gave a short whinny and paced uncomfortably. Lily nudged her gently into a walk. The gait of the half-blood was graceful despite the added weight, probably due to the unicorn blood in her veins. Once Shade had settled into a comfortable pace, Lily scanned the

clearing for Onyx, and found him in the center as a coil of black steel on a sun-warmed boulder, motionless in complete relaxation.

Turning her attention back to Shade, Lily marveled how easy it was for her to carry Lily. The thestral half must have added strength and the unicorn half, tolerance. She squeezed her legs a little tighter and Shade broke into a trot. When Lily gave her a little pat on the neck of approval, she sped into a smoother gait, comfortable with the command.

Once they circled the field, Lily slowed and then stopped, summoning a water bucket so Shade could hydrate herself before they continued. James landed smoothly beside her. "When are you going to fly her?" he asked, leaning casually on his broom. His hair, something that had annoyed Lily so much before, was sticking up messier than usual, but Lily found it quite attractive.

The boy caught her gaze. "What?" he asked suspiciously. "Do I have something in my hair?"

"I was just thinking how adorable it looks like that," she admitted, grinning at him.

"Oh really," he said, giving a playful wink. "Well, I think you look adorable when you're all sweaty and tired."

Lily rolled her eyes and slapped him gently on the arm. He caught her hand and she let him draw her closer. "No, really. It becomes you," he said, kissing her lightly. "Besides, you look beautiful no matter what."

"Is that the only reason you like me? Because I'm pretty?" she teased.

"No," he said solemnly, "you're amazing all around. Besides," he added, teasing again, "you're not just pretty. Drop-dead gorgeous."

"That had a little sting to it," she noted dryly. "Thanks for bringing that up."

"Not like that," he said, sighing. "Honestly, you twist my words all around until it sounds like I'm a shallow idiot."

"You're a shallow idiot?" she repeated, grinning wickedly.

"I—" He broke off, chuckling helplessly. "Back to the subject," he stressed, "Flying?"

“I’ll wait until she’s comfortable with both flying and me riding her, and then we’ll mix the two,” Lily said.

James released Lily, twirling her back towards Shade, who had drunk all of the water. “I’ll let you get back to that, darling,” he said.

“Don’t call me that,” she said for the umpteenth time, rolling her eyes good-naturedly so he would know she was joking. The rest of the afternoon was full of similar events; training Shade with the occasional fun distraction from James Potter.

[illegible]

“As you are all aware, your NEWTs are coming up extremely soon—only one month remains. And you have to pass at least two NEWTs to gain official qualification as a witch or wizard. Only five people have ever had to repeat 7th year since Hogwarts’s founding... Let’s keep it that way,” McGonagall said calmly, eyes lingering on various students around the classroom.

"I'm sensing work," Sirius muttered, leaning back in his chair.

“That is why you will be writing two essays every week until the tests are over. On class we will be practicing the practical portion of the exams,” McGonagall continued, met with groans from much of the class.

As they left the classroom, Remus remarked, "We ought to start studying more often."

James and Sirius exchanged a glance. "I've never failed a test in the last seven years," Sirius reasoned.

“And you don’t want to start when it really matters,” Remus reminded him. “Lily, would you study with us? James won’t do it unless you do.”

James gave an agreeing shrug, smiling at her. “I think Sirius is right,” she said finally.

All three of the boy’s mouths dropped. “Wait, what?” Sirius asked.

“You’re right. Why study? It’s not like you all are going to fail,” Lily said, keeping her eyes forward as they walked.

“But Lily, there grades are important for getting a job,” Remus said, confused.

“No one’s going to expect you to be perfect, and you’ll get a good grade without studying anyway,” Lily replied.

Sirius met James’s eyes and James shrugged. As much as he and Sirius complained about studying, there was not doubt in their minds that they would end up doing it. When Remus looked like he had another objection for Lily, James gave him a small headshake and changed the subject.

Later though, when they were sitting together in the Room of Requirement, James asked Lily, “So, what was wrong earlier?”

“James...” Lily began, but then looked away. “Don’t you know?”

“I’m not as smart as you are,” James said, smiling easily.

“Listen—that means don’t argue. Unless some miracle happens, in a month I’ll be back living as the Stunner, which means we,” she gestured to the small space between them, “only have a month. I don’t want to waste it studying for something that doesn’t matter at all.”

James didn’t reply for a minute. He sat with her in his arms, and stared at the fire reflecting off her hair. “But what if? Can’t we at least prepare for a future?” Lily looked up into his eyes silently. “We’ll be together—there’ll just be a few books, Remus, and Sirius there too.”

“All right,” she conceded, but James couldn’t figure out which of his arguments had won her over.

[illegible]

Finals week approached with startling speed to Severus, who rarely looked up from his notes. He was confident in his mental skills, but studied every chance he could get. When he wasn't absorbed in a textbook, his thoughts drifted without his consent to a painful subject—Lily.

Death Eater meetings had been sparse lately, and the Dark Lord was strangely silent on the subject of Lily. While before the attack on Hogwarts he had ranted seemingly non-stop about retrieving Lily from the castle, the subject had been broached in passion once, and that was initiated by Bellatrix, not Voldemort.

Severus could only find two logical conclusions: Voldemort had finally given up... or had a plan he believed was so foolproof that he did not even consider alternatives. As much as Severus wished it was the first, he was too smart to fool himself into believing the first.

His worries about Lily had plagued him when he could not otherwise distract himself until the point he was here now, hovering near the entrance of the Great Hall. At the beginning of the school year he had known her well enough to know where she was most of the time, but with her new boyfriend her schedule was unpredictable.

The students entering the Great Hall now were drowsy and clumsy, too bust grumbling about another school day and praying for the approaching summer to notice Severus lurking in a partially shadowed alcove.

Finally, the signature laugh of Black drew Severus's attention and he saw Lily arrive with Potter and his cronies. Severus left his hiding place swiftly and walked right by Lily. "I need to talk to you now," he muttered as he passed, hoping the motion seemed casual to those around. Bellatrix had told everyone to avoid Lily until further notice—

Severus worried she knew something he didn't from the feral way her eyes glinted when she considered Lily.

Lily calmly disengaged from the group. She soothed James with a hand on his arm and a murmured word, but the rest put up no fight. Severus didn't look back until they were in a deserted hallway, and then turned to her. "You need to be on your guard," he said bluntly.

Lily smiled. "From who?" The 'now' on the end was not spoken, but clearly implied.

"The Dark Lord has been too quiet," Severus said furtively, though the hallway was empty other than them. Lily was silent. "About you," he clarified needlessly.

Suddenly, she broke out in hissed conversation, with answers coming from her arm and the air beside her neck. She spoke for a long minute, and Severus waited quietly. "You're right," she said in English. "He hasn't even tried to contact me through the Mark in weeks. Does it mean...?"

Severus could tell that she had reached the same two conclusions that he had. "Just be extra careful," Severus warned before turning and beginning to exit.

"Severus..." The name fell from her lips with such familiarity that Severus's heart ached.

"It's getting dangerous—more dangerous—for us to talk," he said, not turning back to her. "I just had to let you know."

"Thank you, Severus," she said softly as he walked out of the hallway.

The testing days fell into an easy routine. After breezing through each test, Lily met James in the kitchens for a snack before going to their next study session together. She spent the study time staring at James trying to memorize his face, voice, and personality. He caught her stare often, but just gave her a smile and looked back at his book.

James seemed to be trying to insure that Lily had memories of him, even if just to appease her now. She knew he had convinced himself that he could be her knight in shining armor and protect her from her future, and was treating her fears as mere pessimism. They were both just humoring each other, confident in their own beliefs of her future.

The Mark of Salazar was becoming more active, weaving around her pale arm impatiently. The graduation ceremony was on the Saturday after the NEWTs were finished—the upcoming Saturday. While the students around her counted down early to the day they would move on into the world, Lily considered it more of a timer attached to an atomic bomb. She could feel everyone with power over her watching the date eagerly. Voldemort would get his Stunner, Salazar his assassin, Dumbledore his spy, James his free girlfriend. Lily was simply waiting to see who would win the control over her life and realized she had no preference for any of the wizards in the contest (except James, of course, but his chances were non-existent anyway).

Therefore, when James asked her if she was going to buy new dress robes for graduation, she snapped, “Can’t anyone think about anything else?” Her voice was loud enough to echo through the kitchens and surprise the house-elves into dropping their plates. “Sorry,” she apologized to the room in general. “That was unnecessary. I’m sorry, James.”

“It’s all right,” he shrugged. “I was just thinking we could go down to Hogsmeade together later this week to get it, or something.”

“I have the one Sirius got me for Christmas,” Lily recalled.

“Oh, right,” James said.

Picking up on his disappointment, Lily amended, "But I'd love to go shopping with you. Besides," she added, "you can pick out the one you like for me."

James leaned forward and brushed his mouth against her lips. "Think they've got any sheer ones?" he murmured, eyes dancing teasingly.

"Let's hope—" Lily saw slight movement over James's shoulder. Moody was leaning against the wall, crutches dangling with an ease that suggested he had been there a while. His eyebrows were raised at the couple. Lily pulled back abruptly, causing James to fall into the table, narrowly avoiding their plates. "Moody," she greeted.

"What are you doing here?" James challenged when he turned around, standing defensively in front of Lily.

"You two look...cozy," Moody observed, eyebrows still high.

James bristled. "What do you want?" Lily kept her face smooth, trying to hide her mortification. She hated Moody seeing her with her boyfriend. Due to her usual emotionless mask, the Auror seeing her with open feelings felt like a violation.

"The Headmaster would like to speak with Evans," Moody told her, a smirk tugging at his thin lips.

"I'll be up later," she told him.

"Now," Moody insisted. "And you can leave your boy toy here."

James took an angry step towards Moody, but Lily stood up and walked in front of him. "Finish eating. I'll see you later," she said as she passed. He reached for her, but Lily stepped away from his hand. "Bye, James."

"Bye, Lily," he said unwillingly.

Lily swept past Moody through the kitchen door. She walked swiftly, hoping he couldn't keep up with her on his crutches. No luck,

however, because he maneuvered up the stairs with ease, catching up with Lily quickly, and she couldn't walk any faster without sacrificing the rest of dignity.

"Aw, puppy love," Moody observed. He was slightly out of breath, so Lily was rewarded for her maliciously fast pace. "What are you screwing with his heart?" Lily kept her face icy and smooth, though it took all of her patience not to hex the Auror into St. Mungo's. "I can't see what you're getting out of it," he continued. "Is it fun leading him on? Did you tell him you're going to live happily ever after?" When Lily still did not answer. "Do you even have a conscience? Merlin, Potter is a sucker."

"Maybe the feeling's mutual," Lily hissed. "Didn't you even consider that possibility?"

Moody feigned contemplation. "Nah," he said finally.

"I know where the Headmaster's office is," Lily hinted.

"I know. I'm just making sure that's where you end up," Moody growled. He continued to bait her, but Lily resolved not to speak another word. Eventually, he gave up, partly because he was running out of breath, and fell in to an annoyed silence beside her until they reached the statue in front of the office. "Blood Pops."

"Do I 'ave to let 'er in?" the gargoyle complained. "I don't like 'er."

"Me either," Moody told the statue. "That's why she's here, so open up." The gargoyle did so eagerly, shooting Lily an annoyed glare. "Huh, you can even piss off statues," Moody commented.

When they entered the office, Dumbledore was sitting at his desk, scribbling on a piece of parchment. He looked up and smiled, eyes twinkling per usual. "Oh, hello Miss Evans. It's lovely to see you. Gingersnap?" Lily shook her head sharply. "Please have a seat," he said, gesturing to the chair in front of him. "So, how have your NEWTs been going?"

“Fine.”

“Very good,” he said. “Now, Miss Evans, it is time to discuss our plans for the coming weekend. Speaking of, are you excited for graduation?”

“Yes,” Lily lied.

“Very good, very good. Once you graduate, you are to ride the train home with your classmates. I’m sure, of course, once in London you can make your way back to Voldemort, correct?”

“Yes.” Not a lie.

“As you know, it is imperative to the success of this war that we are in that you relay intelligence from Voldemort to us. However, we are aware of the proximity he will have with you. You will use Severus as the go-between. Make sure he is in a position so you can tell him any news to give us.”

“Of course. What about my Stunning?” she asked.

“You will continue working as Voldemort instructs,” Dumbledore said.

“What?” Moody exclaimed, echoing Lily’s thoughts. “You’re letting her keep that job? We’ve captured the Stunner, but now we’re sending her out to keep on doing it? I still think it would be better if we just use Snape and lock Evans up somewhere she can’t hurt anyone.”

“Her being the Stunner is her main access to Voldemort. If we started saving everyone she was sent after he would get suspicious and we can not compromise her position,” Dumbledore reasoned. “Which reminds me...” Dumbledore pulled out a delicate anklet with an intricate silver rune charm hanging from it. Lily recognized it as anti-conception charm. “If you get pregnant, you would not only be out of Voldemort’s information circle, but it would also bond you to a Death Eater. I do not believe we should risk that.”

“Excuse me?”

“Of course, I remember your engagement to the younger Lestrangle,” Dumbledore explained. “I’m sure you simply forgot to mention that problem.”

Lily delicately took the silver chain from the Headmaster’s slender fingers and latched it onto her ankle. On contact with her skin, the charm vanished. “Is that everything?”

“Almost,” Dumbledore said, gesturing to Moody. “Please remove the Binding Bangle,” he instructed the Auror.

“What?” he exploded. “I thought I was here to make sure she doesn’t run away!”

“She is unable to leave campus with this on, and it’s almost graduation,” Dumbledore reminded him. “Besides, I’m quite sure she will not leave before graduation—she and Mr. Potter are enjoying their last days together.”

Fury was building inside Lily, but she kept her composure, lifting her wrist up to Moody.

Muttering angrily, Moody quickly took the bracelet off her wrist and jammed in one of his pockets. “There,” he snapped.

“Excellent,” Dumbledore said, clapping his hands together. He looked up at the clock, saying, “It is time for Miss Evans to return to her dormitory. She needs her sleep to do well on the NEWT tomorrow—what is it, Defense? Well, good luck!”

Lily nodded and started for the door with Moody close behind her. “There is no reason to escort her back. I dare say she knows where the Tower is by now after seven years here.” Moody was still arguing when Lily left the room.

Lily was so angry as she stalked back to the dorms that she had to stop and lean her head against the cold stone wall to calm down. She had heard that love hurt, but had never imagined it like this. Everyone was using someone against her. She loved James, but he was just one more weapon for the wrong hands.

Their relationship could only cause more pain for both of them. If Dumbledore would use Petunia against Lily, he could easily use Lily against James and vice versa. For the sake of the only love she'd ever known, Lily was not going to let that happen.

[illegible]

“Hey,” James greeted as she approached him in the otherwise vacant Common Room. “What did Dumbledore want?”

“Just something about my NEWTs,” Lily said. She was having difficulty meeting his eyes, preparing herself.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. When she couldn’t reply, he moved closer to her. “Are you okay?”

Lily took a determined step back. "This has gone on long enough," she said.

“What has?” James asked. Lily could only imagine what her face. If it reflected half the pain she was feeling then it was reason for James to sound so worried. “What’s the matter?”

“Us, we’re the matter,” she replied. “This has to end now.”

“What has to end?” James asked blankly.

“Our relationship.”

“Are you kidding?” he asked incredulously. At her stony silence, James asked, “What did Dumbledore really say to you?”

“Nothing. He didn’t say anything. This is between the two of us. Or more so, that there is no more ‘the two of us.’ I’ve played along, but it’s time for me to focus and for you to move on.”

The only noise in the room for a long moment was the crackling of the fire. James’s expression went through a broad spectrum of emotions, but Lily’s face stayed emotionless. Finally, he asked, “Why?”

“This was nothing,” she told him, hating every word. “I’ve had my fun, but I’ve got a job to do.”

“You love me,” he said with sudden fierceness. When Lily shook her head, he closed the distance between them quickly and his lips crashed upon hers. It was passionate and demanding, but Lily didn’t move in response. He pulled back, searching her eyes. “You can’t tell me that you don’t love me. I know you do.”

“I don’t love you.”

“Lily,” he insisted, breaking her heart. His eyes were tender and sad. “Whatever you’re doing, don’t. We can make it.”

“No!” Lily jerked away from him. Just do it, she urged herself. A few tears now is nothing compared to him wasting his life trying to save you. “I don’t love you—I never did. You’re a decent guy, but there was never anything between us.” When he took a step towards her, she shouted, “I don’t love you! Get it through your thick skull. I would have done this sooner except I liked screwing with your emotions,” she tossed Moody’s words back at herself, “I’ve never met anyone more gullible in my life!”

“Lily…” His eyes were confused and distraught.

“You’re pathetic! Goodnight,” Lily snapped, skirting past his outstretched hand and up her stairs. Once in the safety of her own room, Lily cast a quick Silencing spell around her bed and broke down sobbing.

The wand portion, however, was the best he had ever performed. His frustration gave him power, and the spells came out strong. “My proctor actually stopped grading me to watch you,” Remus told him

afterwards. When James didn't reply, Remus thoughtfully stopped talking. That afternoon when Sirius and Remus were on their way to the Charms study session, James begged off and they let him without argument.

James rambled around the castle unseeingly, avoiding looking at anyone. Most students took one look at him and quickly averted their gazes. He also avoided mirrors.

"So, who dumped who?" growled a voice behind James. He turned and saw a Disillusioned figure close behind him. Moody gestured for James to follow him and led him into the closest classroom. "Where are your friends?" Moody asked when he had closed the door.

"Studying."

Moody leaned against the teacher's desk, his crutch narrowly missing a stack of essays. "So..." he asked.

"She did," James snapped in reply. "What does it matter to you?" He hovered by the door, prepared to leave the conversation.

Moody grunted. "Did she say why?" he asked, completely ignoring James's tension.

"Yes," he replied shortly. He looked up suddenly. "Really, what did Dumbledore talk to her about last night?"

"Her job," Moody said. "But those details are classified."

"Nothing about me?" James sighed.

"In passing," Moody answered. "About how you were the reason she didn't try to bolt again this semester."

"Oh," James replied, disappointed. He had still been clinging to the hope that she had been ordered to break up with him.

The final exam was simple—Runes had no practical portion—and Lily hated that it went by so quickly. Graduation was tomorrow afternoon, and then she'd be back on the train, and then it was back to living as the Stunner.

Lily finished the test early, so she sat staring into space for a full half hour. Like she needs more time to think. She was considering Rabastan Lestrangle distastefully when she heard something whizzing towards her. Lily ducked immediately and the ball of parchment brushed her hair before flying on to hit the wall several feet in front of her.

Lily looked back to see Sirius sitting at the table one back, cross-armed and scowling at her. Lily turned back forward without giving him the satisfaction of a reaction. However, once the fifth paper ball had missed her, annoyance was making her finger clench into fists on the table. She was surprised the test proctors hadn't caught Sirius and accused him of cheating by throwing her the answers.

Finally, one landed on her desk of flying past. Lily saw this one had ink on it. She unwrapped it and read the brief contents. 'What the hell?' was the sharp message.

Lily crumpled the paper back into a ball, and allowed it to slip off her table to join the others on the floor. Another soon landed on her desk. Calmly, Lily opened it and scanned it coolly. 'Congratulations. He's heartbroken. Now you can go on and ruin a thousand other peoples' lives with your daddy.' Without showing her reaction, she tipped the parchment off the edge of her table.

She knew James was heartbroken. She'd seen him with his friends and read his sadness, but refused to repent. James would get over her, and his friends would just have to deal until then. The balls of parchment kept coming, but Lily didn't open another.

After she had turned in her translation, she hurried towards the door. A hand clenched onto her forearm and turned her towards him. Sirius met her eyes, challenging her to make a scene. "Let's talk," he told her.

Lily nodded once and allowed him to lead her out of her Great Hall and into the nearest empty classroom. Once they were out of sight of the other students, Lily cast a Silencing Spell over the room and turned expectably back to Sirius.

“Well?” he asked, gray eyes flashing angrily.

“Well what?” Lily asked calmly, meeting his dark gaze.

“What’s your deal?” he asked. “Why did you do it?”

“I’m sure James told you,” she said.

Sirius crossed his arms. “No, actually. He won’t. So what happened?”

Lily quickly suppressed her love towards James—he was protecting her even now... just what she was trying to prevent. “Frankly,” she said, “I didn’t love him. I never did.”

“That’s a lie,” Sirius said, too perceptively for her taste. “What did they say to you?” he asked, eyes narrowed.

“Nothing! If I could fool the Dark Lord into trusting me, surely I could trick James Potter.” She kept her voice emotionless, knowing it would alienate the Gryffindor.

“Voldemort threatened to kill you, so you had to lie. Why would you lie to make James love you?” Sirius asked disbelievingly.

“For fun.” The words were evil to her, but she forced herself to say them. “No reason not to and it was entertaining. There were holes in her story, but she hoped Sirius’s irrational passion would aid her lies. “He’s very gullible.”

“Then why tell him now? School’s over and we graduate tomorrow,” Sirius said, voice rising.

“He’s pathetic, but he needed to know the truth,” Lily said calmly. “Sorry you’ve got to deal with him now—just tell him to move on.”

Sirius scowled. When his hand darted to his pocket, Lily quickly immobilized him. "It'll wear off in a few minutes," she told him, removing the protective charms on the classroom and leaving the frustrated boy behind.

[illegible]

“It’s just so weird,” Remus said thoughtfully. He was sitting with Sirius by the lake, surrounded by students celebrating the end of school. “Things just don’t add up.” They spoke quietly, though James was back up in their dormitory.

“She seemed very serious—no puns now, please,” Sirius said, leaning against the warm grass. Sirius was frustrated that he couldn’t help his best friend who was in so much pain.

“Always,” Remus noted. “Did she really say it was ‘for fun?’ That’s not normal for her.”

“How do we know what’s normal for her if she’s been lying this whole time?” Sirius asked.

“What about her eyes?” Remus asked suddenly, sitting up straight.

“Why?”

“Because,” Remus said, meeting Sirius’s eyes, “if she was emotional, then you’d know she was being honest. No emotions, she was lying.”

“Her eyes were blank,” Sirius began uncertainly, “but maybe she just didn’t want me to see—”

“She was telling you straight up—why hide her feelings?” Remus reasoned. “Maybe Voldemort did tell her to break up with him.”

Sirius was unconvinced. “We can’t tell James that and we can’t confront Lily again—if we tell James he’ll get his hopes up and Lily won’t tell us either way.”

“But if she was forced to do it then she doesn’t really want to do it,” Remus said. “We should call Bones. He can read her well.”

Sirius nodded. "Don't mention anything to James until we're sure," he warned. "We can't break his heart again."

[illegible]

The two Js were up early putting on their robes for graduation. Their arguing voices brought Lily to consciousness, but she did not get out of bed. This was it. After graduation she'd be back on the Hogwarts Express for the last time, and then it was back to Nightshade Mansion.

Finally she dragged herself out of bed—Onyx refused to wake up—and looked through her trunk. She found the beautiful robes Sirius had got her for Christmas, but could not wear them without attracting attention.

Then again... Why not wear them? This was her last day of school ever—the last time she'd see anyone here that she wouldn't either Stun or employ later in life.

She shook the robes out sharply and slipped them on. The fabric was soft and rested comfortably on her pale skin. She brushed her hair methodically and tied it up in a high ponytail.

Graduation was set for noon, but they were supposed to gather for a seventh year reception at 11. Lily nudged Onyx and helped him slide up her arm and wrap around her slender neck. “We’re leaving here soon,” Lily assured him.

He hissed softly. "Finally." Seeing that Lily didn't share his joy, he asked, "What's wrong?"

Lily began down the staircase, and replied to the invisible cobra. "I'm not ready to go back. I mean, I am," she told the Mark, who had hissed in annoyance, "but I'm just not...ready."

Their conversation had to stop when Lily entered the cleared out Great Hall where the rest of the seventh years were spread out, talking to their friends and family. Lily stood at the edge of a small group to blend in and waited patiently for the ceremony to start.

"Lily," said a voice, tapping her shoulder. Fearing that James or one of the other Marauders was trying to confront her, Lily turned slowly, face carefully schooled. To her shock, Bones stood casually behind her, wearing a set of crisp blue dress robes and a large smile. "Hello."

"Hello," Lily greeted cautiously. She felt Onyx shift on her neck, still uncomfortable around him. Lily began to ask why he was there, but held her tongue.

"Professor Bones!" exclaimed another seventh year girl, a Ravenclaw.

"Hello, Marie," he greeted, eyes only flickering from Lily's face a second before returning. "Lily, may I speak with you?"

Lily nodded and gestured for him to talk. He shook his head, glancing around the crowded Great Hall. "Outside. We'll be back for the ceremony." She followed him from the Great Hall to the same classroom she had talked with Sirius the afternoon before.

"School's finally over," Bones said smiling. "I counted down for my graduation by day for two years." Lily didn't respond. "How are you feeling?"

Lily met his eyes and replied calmly, "Prepared."

“You’ve got everything done? No loose ends?” he pressed.

“If you’re going to ask about James, just do it,” Lily told him coolly.

“Well, if you’re going to tell me anything, I don’t really have to ask, right?” Bones smiled and leaned against the door. “So, anything you’d like discuss?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Lily replied. “Tonight it’s on the train back to being the Stunner. I won’t be seeing you or James or Dumbledore again, since I’m supposed to ‘go through Severus.’ So no, no last words.”

“We can keep him safe from Voldemort, you know.”

“I know,” she said dully. “James and Petunia, safe under Order care.”

Next door, she heard the voices quieting down so she gestured for Bones to precede her through the door. However, he was still, thinking over her words. Comprehension dawned in his eyes suddenly. “You think—”

“The ceremony’s starting,” Lily said, brushing past him and hurrying back into the Great Hall.

Sorry for the delay and the short chapter. Only one chapter left and an epilogue!!!! I might make a sequel depending on continued reviews, so... REVIEW.

James patted his friends on the back before separating into the alphabetical line. Dumbledore stood at his podium and gave a short speech. It was full of pride, hope, and memories, but James barely listened. This was the end of a life forever. Seven years were now his past.

The names began. Sirius was called up directly after Bellatrix. Though he sent a scowl in her direction, Sirius was obviously happy. James gave a cheer and pumped his fist in the air. Sirius grinned over at James before taking his place in the short line.

“If we could hold the applause to the end...?” McGonagall said, looking at James, but a smile was on her lips as she continued reading.

“Evans, Lily Delilah Aria,” McGonagall called, reminiscent of the first time James had heard her name at their first year Sorting. James watched her as she took strode up quickly and took the diploma that made her a fully legal witch, and stood to the side with the others.

Soon, it was James’s turn. “Potter, James Richard,” McGonagall said. The walk to McGonagall seemed to last forever, briefly the sole center of attention. He shook McGonagall’s hand firmly and took the diploma. She winked at him, smiling. “Congratulations,” she told him. He stood in the line of graduates, unfortunately separated from all of his friends, except Peter who stood within three students of James, but Remus high-fived him as he walked back to his place in the line.

Once everyone had received their diplomas and the cheers had died down, Dumbledore stood up. “Now as Hogwarts graduates please have one more small meal provided by your alma mater.” He gestured and the tables lining the Great Hall filled with platters of varied hors d'oeuvres.

James caught sight of his mum’s happy face before he was engulfed in a tight hug. His da hugged him next, beaming. “I knew you’d do it! I’m so proud of you James,” his mum said.

His dad laughed. "You wouldn't believe the amount of times I had to tell your mother you'd be fine when we'd get those letters from McGonagall detailing your latest escapades." He patted James's back. "I really am so proud of you."

James heard the mutterings start around him, but ignored it at first, busy talking with his parents. As the whispers spread, James looked up from his friends and family to see what the focus of their attention was outside the tall Great Hall windows.

The day outside was bright and cheerful. The students under seventh year were lounging by the lake. He looked there first—but everyone looked peaceful. Then James saw the triangle of black-robed figures striding purposefully across the lawn towards the castle. With a gasp, he recognized Lord Voldemort leading the small group.

Dumbledore's voice rang out. "Quiet!" he instructed. Silence immediately fell and expectant faces turned towards the Headmaster. "It seems that the wards we lowered for family of the graduating had a slight glitch," he said calmly. "If everyone would please sit down and erect a shield around your family?"

There was rustling as people hastened to follow the instructions. Those still standing were the teachers, Bones, and a few defiant students, including James, Remus, Sirius, Bellatrix Black, Rudolphus LeStrange, and Lily Evans.

James drew his wand. The Death Eaters were there for Lily. They were willing to fight. The students and teachers were ready to fight. A few dozen yards from the destined battle scene was the Hogwarts student population by the lake. James gulped—this was going to get ugly.

"I'm going to lock down the castle and set a shield over the lake," Dumbledore announced to the worried parents.

There was a shattering of glass as a flash of red and black jumped through the window. Lily walked swiftly towards the Death Eaters, not even glancing back at the stunned occupants of the Great Hall.

James felt as though the world was spinning around him. “James.” Bones grabbed his arm, speaking hurriedly. “She still loves you.”

The words clicked in his mind while he was already running towards the window after Lily. His feet hit the lawn before he realized he didn't actually have a plan, but that didn't stop him from sprinting forward.

[illegible]

Lily heard the shouts from behind her, but ignored them as she met Voldemort on the lawn.

“At least this time you thought to blow the glass out before we jumped out,” Onyx said from around her neck. “What are we doing?”

“This is what I have to do,” Lily said softly.

They were closer to the Forest than the castle when Lily intersected the group of Death Eaters, but were uncomfortably close to the lake. She bowed to Voldemort. "Hello," she greeted.

“Lady Velisna,” the Dark Lord said, sighing. A smile ghosted his face, which was handsome except his disconcerting red eyes. He cast one hungry look up at the castle, then motioned to the Death Eaters and the formation reversed. “We have what we came for,” he said.

They walked unhindered until they got close to the Forbidden Forest.

“Expelliarmus!” A voice cried behind them.

In unison the Death Eaters turned, ready to fight, Voldemort pushing himself to the front of the formation, and Lily saw James standing defiantly alone in front of the half dozen wizards. He saw Lily and nodded to her, adjusting his grip on his wand. "No..." she whispered. The word was hardly audible to Lily herself.

Before the wizards had time pull out their wands, Lily whipped out her wand. “Stupefy!” she shouted. A bright flash of red swept over the Death Eaters, and the three nearest Death Eaters closest to her fell over, unconscious.

Voldemort whirled around, mouth open in shock that she had just attacked his forces. “Run, James!” she said, leveling her wand with the remaining wizards as she backed slowly towards the Forbidden Forest. It took the Death Eaters some time to react—they had obviously not been expecting an attack from within their own group. James raced past Lily into the woods. “Stupefy!” Lily said again, taking out the part of the group closest to her.

As they fell, she turned and bolted into the woods. If she could just get out far enough, she could Apparate away. She ducked to avoid a low branch at the same time a slice of purple light shot over her head. “Get her!” she heard Voldemort yell, and then the footsteps behind her sped up.

“James?” she called. Her feet took her rapidly through the woods thanks to her runs, and she feared she would overtake James and leave him between her and the group of Death Eaters.

James fell into step next to her, startling her. “This way,” he said, nodding to the left.

Lily followed him. Without having to focus on directions also, Lily took the time to set a strong shield at their backs, just in time. “Why did you come after me?” she asked him, following him over a fallen log.

“We need more speed,” he said, not answering her question. He stuck his wand in his mouth and, in the time of a blink, James had transformed from his human body into a stag, which was better equipped for running in the woods. Lily quickly followed by becoming a wolf. She was thankful she had already set a shield because she could not cast any spells in her animal form.

Other than speed, another positive trait of their Animagus forms was stealth. Behind them, she heard the Death Eaters split up, which

meant they had lost their trail. James and Lily ran quickly and in sync. Lily felt she could predict James's next turn just by being near him.

Suddenly, she realized where they were going and wanted to laugh, but the wand clenched in her sharp teeth and her lack of a functioning voice box stopped her. They burst into the clearing far ahead of the pursuers. As they approached the shabbily made stall, Shade gave a frightened neigh, obviously smelling Lily's wolf form. They transformed as close to the stall as they could get, and Lily quickly opened the door.

The unicorn-thestral mix backed up cautiously, white leather wings folding nervously. Muttering calming words, Lily hooked Shade up with a bridle with quick efficiency, trying not let her sense of urgency spook the mixed breed. She had ridden the hybrid, but James had not, but she knew they had no other choice.

As they led Shade out of the stall, a commotion from the edge of the woods threw Lily into action.

"Can you jump up?" Lily asked James, handing him the reins. He nodded and fluidly mounted Shade, but narrowly avoiding her wings, which were flapping in irritation.

"Sorry," he said. "I can't really see her, remember?"

"Lily..." the Mark hissed by her shoulder. "You can't do this."

Lily was about to answer when a pair of Death Eaters burst from the trees. They spotted Lily and James immediately, and pointed their wands at them. Lily stepped away from James to meet them. "Lily!" James said, scrambling to dismount.

"Stay on," she ordered. "I need to be able to jump on and leave right away." As she spoke she drew a complex shape in the air, and a blue-glowing stone wall appeared between her and the oncoming Death. "It won't hold them long," she said, turning back to James. She stood next to him, looking up into his eyes. "Why did you come after me?" she asked.

“I love you,” he said fiercely. “And you love me too. I’m not going to let you throw your life away.”

Lily faltered. If she went back to Voldemort, James would finally be convinced to move on without her, and finally be safe. If she stayed with him, people would be after her forever, assuming the Mark didn’t kill her the moment she made her decision. Life with her would be dangerous for James, and she couldn’t forgive herself if he died for her sake. But looking into his sincere hazel eyes, she knew she couldn’t live without him. She nodded. “Scoot back,” she said.

James smiled and her heart lifted. This was the right choice. She jumped onto Shade just as her shield broke, letting the Death Eaters come through. James thrust the reins into her hands, locked an arm around her small waist, and said, “Let’s fly. I’ll guard our backs.”

Without hesitation, Lily spurred Shade into a run. Normally they started the take-off from the edge of the field, and Lily worried if Shade could pick up enough speed before the approaching line of trees, especially with the added weight.

Behind her, James cast a quick spell down at the Death Eaters, followed by a shield to protect them. One Death Eater fell, but the remaining one maintained pursuit. Lily nudged Shade faster. They were almost at the trees. She pulled the reins up, giving Shade another nudge. Her wings snapped out and she leapt up into the air. The wind from her long leather wings teased Lily’s hair, and James had to turn around, unable to aim at the Death Eater through the flapping wings.

Shade’s hooves hit the tops of the trees, but they skimmed over, safely away from the clearing. Lily laughed out loud, leaning back slightly into James’s grasp. “I do love you,” she said, though her words were whipped away by the wind.

She thought James had not heard, but he leaned forward and spoke into her ear. “I love you too. I’m sorry I ever doubted you.”

“Then I won’t let him make you leave. My parents can charm this area so no one can come in, no on you don’t want.”

“Go back,” the Mark instructed.

“Your sister’s safe with the Order,” James reminded her. “There’s nothing stopping you from staying.”

“There are other things...” Lily said, trying to think of them without success. If this house was truly as warded as James said, she was protected from Voldemort and Dumbledore here. She had no further obligation to them.

“Go now or I’ll...” the Mark hissed.

Lily suddenly jerked back her sleeve and glared at the tattoo. “Then do it!” she snapped. The Mark hissed softly at her, showing its fangs, but did not attack. Realization flooded Lily’s mind and she laughed derisively. “You can’t—can you?” she asked.

“You’re still kin of Master Salazar now. I am here to protect you, not harm you,” the Mark admitted, “but it is your destiny to—”

“No death threat? Then there’s no way I’ll do what you want me to,” she said. She jerked her sleeve back down over the tattoo and looked back up at James. “I...I don’t know if this can last,” she said hesitantly, “but as long as I can be here, I want to be here.”

James rushed to her and swept her into his arms. He leaned to kiss her, but hesitated. “Why did you...?”

Lily shook her head. “It doesn’t matter. I love you.” She leaned up and kissed him softly.

He leaned back. “I need to know. I trusted you---was I right?”

“Yes,” Lily said. “I was worried that if Dumbledore knew I loved you—knew you love me back—it would be a tool for him. Even worse, if the Dark Lord found out...”

“You selfless...” James moaned, crashing his lips against her. “I love you,” he said softly, pulling back and meeting her eyes.

“And that’s why it was the most selfish thing I’ve ever done. I can’t stand to see you killed. You could have gotten over me, and I’d at least know I’d saved you,” she said.

“That’s where you were wrong—I could never get over you. I love you.”

Lily considered futilely arguing her point, but found her lips were too busy to form words.

The End

After four years of writing this story, Lily finally got her happy ending. I think I got everything wrapped up well. The epilogue is coming soon. Thank you for reading and I hope you enjoyed!